

Russell Kelfer

While They Were Sleeping

#1358-B

Series: The Parables of Scripture

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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The scene has not changed. Jesus is still seated in that tiny fishing boat, a crowd of eager listeners standing on the shore, mesmerized by this amazing carpenter, even though most of them didn't understand a word He said. Oh, they understood the stories, *but they did not have ears to hear the truth the stories were trying to communicate.*

The disciples did. To them it was given to understand. Jesus had begun with an intriguing story about seed and soil, which later turned out to be a sermon about the human heart. He wanted those who had ears to hear to understand that bearing spiritual fruit in a spiritual kingdom *is not automatic.* There has to be some tending of the soil, or *other things will enter in and choke the word so that it does not bear fruit at all.*

Having completed that first story, Jesus continued on a similar theme, again using soil, seed, and weeds as His examples, but He was no longer speaking of spiritual growth, but of spiritual life. Never would any words of His be more important, but unfortunately, few of His words have been more overlooked. The Master's penetrating eyes scan the shoreline as He continues:

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

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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. (Matthew 13: 24-30)

We have glanced at this passage in the past; let's stop and soak it in word by word and thought by thought and see what our Savior is trying to say. It ought to overwhelm us and cause us to see life and people and the ministry of the church in a different light.

Here, once again is a picture of a farmer planting seed. And, again, the seed is spectacular, and the soil is good. This, too, ought to produce a bountiful harvest. Once more, something bad happens, only this time *it does not prevent the good seed from reaching forth, breaking through the soil, bearing precious fruit.* What happens is that an enemy steals into the field at night, and *while they were sleeping*, he throws in seeds that will produce weeds, hoping to destroy the whole crop.

While they were sleeping. Capture that thought. It is the silent signal to those who have ears to hear. The workers questioned their master about the quality of the seed He had sown. *"Didn't you use good seed, master?"* they asked. *"Oh, yes,"* the owner of the field replied, *"I planted wonderful seed. But the enemy has stolen in and planted other seed."*

The workers caught on. They thought they had the solution. *"Shall we pull up the weeds now?"* they asked. The master had a decidedly different solution. *"No,"* he responded, *"Let them grow side by side until harvest time. If you try to pull up the weeds now, you will unknowingly destroy some of the good fruit of the soil. When it's time, I will send out my reapers, and they will know what to do. The good wheat I will gather up and keep. The weeds I will bind in bundles and burn."*

As with the parable of the sower, there were deep spiritual truths hidden within the context of this simple-sounding story. Most of the crowd standing and sitting along the shoreline, though impressed with the authority and love with which this man spoke, really didn't grasp the significance of seeds and weeds and harvest time. A few of them may have been farmers, and the stories may have had special meaning to them, but most of them were intrigued with Jesus, not necessarily with what

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He was saying, *because they didn't understand what He was saying.*

And those who had ears to hear did not yet, for the most part, understand how to take the characters in the story and assign to them counterparts in the spirit realm. Nor did they understand how to take events in the stories and align them with events in the coming kingdom. It was for that reason that they cornered Jesus as soon as the crowd had dispersed and began to question Him about what this parable meant. Once again, He graciously told them, *for that was the reason He had been speaking in parables. He wanted those with ears to hear to understand.* He and the disciples slipped away into a nearby house, and this is what ensued:

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

He answered and said unto them, 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.

(Matthew 13:36-43)

Listen carefully to what Jesus is trying to say to those with ears to hear. He is trying to paint for us, on a canvas of simplicity, a global photograph of this present age and of the judgment to come. He has done so in parable format, and now He is explaining the parable to those who can understand. Many principles surface, and one or two incredible absolutes will be left standing, begging all believers to stand upon them as long as they shall live. Let's take a walk through a field, sown in love, yet

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riddled with tares, and see what we are to do about it.

1- The people sat side by side, but only some received truth.

It is a mystery, but it is a fact. Jesus' words were the word of God, and as they went forth, *not everyone understood*. Some were disinterested, some doubtful, some skeptics of the highest order. Scribes and Pharisees, no doubt stood by, possibly relieved at the way Jesus was teaching, assuming He could do no harm to their religious hierarchy by telling children's stories. There were others standing there who wanted to hear, but were not ready. They had not yet come to see God for who He is and sin for what it is. They were interested in a good sermon and were even drawn to things spiritual. But their time had not yet come. And this sermon was not for unbelievers. It was a treatise on the kingdom, designed for those in the kingdom. You cannot teach spiritual truth to unbelievers and expect them to either understand or obey. The Scripture says it is foolishness to them. Indeed it is.

2- The disciples set a beautiful example for us of what to do when you hear truth, but don't understand it. You go ask Jesus to tell you what it meant.

How seldom we practice this incredible principle. We assume that whatever we understand out of a given passage or a given message is all we are going to get, when we may well be standing on the shoreline of an ocean of deeper truth that God is waiting to reveal. But God wants us to demonstrate our hunger. Thus, He waited until the disciples asked Him to explain what this story meant. When they asked, He opened the treasure house of heaven and poured into their lives vivid photographs of the world, the church, and the kingdom to come. All He was waiting for was for them to ask.

It's still true today. How often do you make notes of things you are reading or hearing that capture your imagination, or even your curiosity, that you do not quite understand? Do you then enter the quiet place in humility and ask the One who longs to reveal to you all His Father has revealed to Him to teach you? If you do, He will. Do we not read in Psalm 25:8,9 these words?

Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.

The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. (Psalm 25:8,9)

Did He not promise us in James 1:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to

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all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

(James 1:5-8)

He longs for us to humbly ask Him to make His word plain to us. He longs for us to ask Him to open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of His word. The disciples asked, and Jesus unveiled the truths of heaven, for them and for us. And He will do the same for us today.

3- The only seed that can produce any spiritual harvest is sown by Jesus. He is the way and the only way to the Father. "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man." There would be philosophers, theologians, educators, and men in high places who would endeavor to become little gods placing in the heart of men and women kernels of truth that supposedly could change their lives. Oh, beloved, do not be confused. There is only one source of truth in the universe and that is the word of God.

In the same way, there is only one source of the seed of God's word and that is God Himself. He spoke it, He owns it, and He alone has the capacity to take it and place it in the human heart. Only that seed can produce spiritual transformation. Only that seed can change the character of man and reproduce the character of God. Anything else is a sham, a cheap imitation, a cleverly-devised counterfeit. Some of it will *look like God's word and even sound like God's word*. Beware. There are no additions to Scripture. Revelation 22:18 reminds us:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

(Revelation 22:18)

The Word of God is complete and it is finished. The grass will wither, the flower will fade, but it will stand forever. Trust it. Envelope it. Let it envelope you. It is the precious pipeline God has designed to allow the very words of His heart to flow into yours.

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4- The field is the world (or the world system). It might be more literally translated, the field is *in* the world. In either case, the field in question is located in what we know as the world. It is here that we must reside until we are carried home. It is here, where the enemy has controlled access to the fields of our hearts, that the battle ensues. The seeds are sown everywhere in the field, which is the world. Pay attention, however, to the context. The field is the world, but the problem is one of intent to create confusion about who is or isn't good seed.

The bulk of Satan's sowing, then, is where? It is *alongside the real seed*. His hope is that both the world, the believers, and the reapers will come to the place where they can't tell the difference, *or they will come to the place where they determine that if you can't tell for sure, it doesn't matter*. Satan's goal is to plant spiritual look-alikes alongside the converted, mixing them together in some form of acceptable institution, until seed and weed become indistinguishable one from the other.

Perhaps he has succeeded here more than in any other place. He has tried to convince mankind that if you put up a steeple with a cross on it, have a preacher or priest or teacher or scholar stand there with a Bible in his hand and use the name of Jesus, *maybe even baptizing and sending missionaries*, it has to be the real thing.

Satan has built churches, beloved, and he has gladly taken control of ones that once delivered truth. He loves to masquerade as an angel of light. He loves to pretend that because so many different denominations and interpretations vie for man's allegiance, *it really doesn't matter what you believe*. Oh, it matters. Do you believe that God's Son died on a Roman cross for your sins, was buried, and rose again? Do you believe that receiving that precious, free gift of salvation, earned for you at His expense on Calvary, is essential to eternal life? Do you believe that only those who receive that free gift receive Him?

You may find a bevy of theological tongue-twisters to hassle over. That's your privilege. But, beloved, don't hassle over the Cross. Without it, you are lost, on your way to eternity in hell, and have no hope. I don't care what church you helped to build or what organ you helped to pay for. Jesus paid it all. And until you come to experience something called "conversion" and are "born from above" you can look like a Christian, act like a Christian,

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even sing like a Christian, *but when the angels come, beloved, at the end of the age, none of that will be of any significance.* You must be born again. And what Satan has done in this church age is to so sprinkle the landscape with Christianity, that we can't survey the landscape and find the Christians.

It isn't hard to join most Christian churches. It isn't even hard to become a deacon or elder or steward or teacher in many Christian churches. In some, about the only thing that will disqualify you is the very thing that ought to qualify you, a strong stand on the Cross and the word of God. That's too narrow for many who pretend to lift the banner of truth.

It's no more narrow, however, than Jesus made it. And He is the One and the only One who has the right to draw the parameters. He made it so clear even a child could understand it; but man thinks he needs to complicate the simple, so he has erected giant cathedrals as monuments to his theological wisdom, missing the simple, unmistakable truth that there is only one way to God and it *must pass beneath that Cross.*

5- Don't worry about being left behind. You're marked with the seal of God's Spirit and the angels will be supernaturally gifted with the discernment to see that mark at the end of the age. God makes no mistakes. If you have received Christ and have the Spirit resident within you and you know you have been born again, a wonderful wedding awaits you in glory, and an eternity of fellowship with God awaits you as well. God has His eye on you. Peter says you are being *kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* (I Peter 1:5) You will be surprised at many you find yourself fellowshiping with in heaven. They may not have belonged to your denomination, they may not have even held to your theological interpretation of the last days, or of baptism, or of spiritual gifts. But I can guarantee you one thing: they will have been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ and been made new creatures in Him. They will have been born again.

6- Satan's great advantage in this age is that so many churches have forgotten their mission, and so many believers live in such a way that their lives are absolutely no different than the average unbeliever. Those are two totally different problems, but they have a common solution.

The first issue is that Satan, having planted bad seed in

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with the good seed has built an acceptable religious system that even pays respect to the Cross. So long as it doesn't lead men and women *to that Cross personally*, he is satisfied. You can join most churches today without ever having to "confess with your mouth" the Lord Jesus, by sharing who He is and what He has done to save you. Therefore, we have millions of Christian churches dotting the landscape with choirs, Sunday schools, vacation Bible schools, building programs, and packed houses on Sunday morning, and it's easier to join some of them than it is to buy a ticket to a local basketball game. You just have to show up, show an interest, and maybe listen to some theological information that has nothing to do with your eternal salvation... and you're in.

Consequently, these are gatherings of people professing to be believers, acting out the process of adhering to Christian beliefs, but only some of the people are truly born again. That percentage may vary from a cluster of excited, transformed believers in a Sunday school class over in the corner of a building, to churches where a large group of the converted have mixed in a growing sprinkling of Christianized unbelievers who not only are thought to be Christians, *they believe it themselves*. Some of them are so self assured, they can act out the Christian life well enough to be placed in positions of leadership, making spiritual decisions without the Spirit, leading people in things eternal, while they are destined to an eternity in hell.

The second part of the dilemma is that these Christianized unbelievers can fit right in because many of them live more like Christians than the Christians. They imitate righteousness, thinking that's what Christians do, and because the light that shines from so many of our lives is so dim, there is no reason to question the difference.

God expects us to be transformed into His image. God's Spirit is to so possess us that we no longer explode, for example, in a fit of rage when things don't go our way. His Spirit has our spirit of anger under control. God is to be so evident in our lives that when trials come and disappointments abound, we respond with joy unspeakable; with peace unbroken. When God is in control of the believer, His heart and soul cry out for the Living God. He cannot wait to be with Him, to worship Him, to serve Him. Have you ever meditated on I Peter 2:11,12? It says:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims,

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abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (I Peter 2:11,12)

The world ought to be able to tell the difference. The way you dress should be different. It should reflect the holiness of God. The way you talk should be different. It should reflect the gentleness of God. The way you conduct business should be different. It should reflect the goodness of God. The way you treat your family should be different. It should reflect the agape love of God. The very look on your face should be different. It should reflect the presence of God.

And, beloved, you should be so aware of that precious Cross in every thing you say and do, that everyone you meet *in or out of the church* should bring to your mind the wonderful gift of salvation. You may or may not know whether they are a believer, but you should be sensitive enough to know how to pray for them, and if you are in a position of leadership in the church, you must never compromise truth. You must love everyone who walks through those doors, saved or not. But you must never so cloud the truth that they might be tempted to think they are born again when they aren't. And you must never approve of any kind of system that allows people to align themselves with the church until they have been given the privilege of sharing how they came to Christ and what He means to them.

The church is not a club, beloved, that you join to improve your image or enjoy new benefits. The church is a living body of which Christ is the Head, and in which only those whose sins have been buried beneath that precious blood belong. Which brings us to the final truth.

7- It all happened while they were sleeping. The ones entrusted to care for the master's field were fast asleep, and the enemy knew it. He didn't have to create some great diversion, so he could sneak in the gate and plant the phony seeds. It was a piece of cake. They were fast asleep. Oh, they may have been physically awake. They may have been buried in committee meetings and planning sessions and even preaching ministries. They may have been sending missionaries to the end of the earth to share the good news of the Cross and deliverance from sin, all the while

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snoozing as Satan entered in and made it just a little easier to be a member of the body without being a part of the body.

While they were sleeping, the enemy came. It might be paraphrased, “While they weren’t paying attention to what really mattered” the enemy came. And while we are sleeping, he is still coming. He wants us to make little doctrinal compromises. He wants us to change our convictions about crucial moral issues, lest we be considered too narrow. He wants us to agree that the Scriptures may have meant that in Jesus’ day, but today is different. No, beloved, the word of our God abideth forever. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And if certain things are said to be sin in Scripture, they are no less sin today and will be no less sin the day the trumpet of God is sounded. The church must stop changing its principles every time the wind of public opinion blows or the degenerating morals of society take another nosedive.

But the real issue here is singular. It has to do with being saved or lost; born again or not. And the crux of the parable is that as time goes by, Satan will so confuse the issue with pseudo-Christian counterfeits that the world, and even the Christian world will stop trying to figure it out. To the world, everything that has a steeple on it is a church, and everything that has a cross on it is a Christian church, and by osmosis or something, everyone that ventures inside a Christian church is a Christian. Thus, Christianity becomes, not an issue of conversion, but of identification. Join the club and you join the kingdom.

And we all attend funerals where well-meaning people try to comfort the loved ones of the deceased with platitudes that imply that all who didn’t really hate Christianity must be a Christian, and besides, a loving God wouldn’t send anyone any where unpleasant. And so the lie goes on. Others stand at wedding ceremonies where God’s word forbids true believers from joining in matrimony with unbelievers and because they are being wed in a beautiful sanctuary with a cross engraved on the pulpit, the ceremony assumes the two are born again. And so the lie goes on.

We go to enough services, attend enough funerals, read enough of the world’s philosophy, and before long, *we believe it*. Oh, not intellectually. We can make our case from Scripture. But when it really counts, we vacillate. We don’t want to offend. And

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so the lie goes on.

At the end of the age, however, the lie will end. God will send forth His angels and He will take all of those whose sins have not been covered by His Son's precious blood and they will be cast into a furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. I didn't write that; God did. Either it is true, or none of it's true. You can't pick and choose and create your own gospel. That is what is happening in the world today, and Satan is delirious with delight. He has entered in *while we were sleeping*, and planted pseudo seeds of make-believe Christianity, and as we sleep, the fields around us are being taken over by tares or weeds. They look a lot like the real thing. But they're not.

Jesus wanted to be sure the disciples understood this. So He went on, in verse 47, to tell them another story with the same message:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:47-50)

I'd say the Master wanted us to get the picture. The net will include every kind of person in the world: physicians, educators, laborers, politicians, kings, peasants, and religious zealots. They will come from every kindred, tribe and tongue. They will be gathered from every corner of the world, every walk of life, every color, every language, every generation that has ever lived. Once again, however, our Lord divides all of mankind into only two categories of people. Not the haves and the have-nots. Not the leaders and the followers. Not the religious and the not so religious. Two categories, and only two.

Jesus has said everyone will either be born again or lost, covered by the blood of Christ or left to die in their sins. Some who are lost may be moral, good, generous, and kind. They may be tender towards God and interested in spiritual things. But if they have never said "yes" to Christ, they are as lost as the most heinous criminal in history, and they will be cast into a furnace of fire heated to the same temperature as the one for the cruelest

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dictator ever to live. It is that simple. Don't make it any more complicated. Don't play the devil's game.

In the garden, Jesus went to pray. All He asked His beloved disciples to do was stay awake and pray. But when He returned to see them, they were fast asleep, and while they were sleeping, the Son of God made the greatest transaction ever made. He surrendered to die on a Cross for you and for me. They missed the greatest moment in history, *while they were sleeping*.

So it is in our generation. While the enemy is sneaking in poisoning the soil of the church with unbelieving seeds, the church by and large is sleeping. Isn't it time to wake up? This parable has some variables. The tide can be reversed, at least in our little world. What can you do?

1- You can wake up and be sure that membership in your church is predicated on a clear testimony of salvation, and nothing else.

2- You can wake up and be sure that men and women slated for leadership in your fellowship can articulate honestly that Christ came into their hearts and saved them.

3- You can be sure that the gospel is preached consistently to those who might have drifted into your fellowship as well as those members who think they are believers, but might not be.

4- You can be sure that you view the world around you as Jesus does, in two categories, and only two: those who are saved and those who are not, and that you seek out the lost.

5- You can be sure that you pray daily, hourly if possible for those in your fellowship whom God knows have been, Christianized, but not converted. He knows; you don't.

That second parable ends in verse 51 this way:

Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things?
They say unto him, Yea, Lord. (Matthew 13:51)

It would make no sense to end this lesson any other way than to ask you the same question. "Have you understood these things?"

If the answer is "Yea, Lord", then isn't it time to wake up, lest "while we are sleeping" the travesty goes on?

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Read Matthew 13:24-29 again. Pick out the three most important phrases. What do they say about who sowed the tares? About who let it happen? About what God plans to do about it?

2- Read Matthew 13:36-43 again. Who sowed the good seed? What is the good seed? Who will the reapers be? What will happen to the bad seed? What will happen to the good seed?

3- What did the disciples do that prompted Jesus to explain the parable? What lesson does it teach us?

4- Read Matthew 13:47-50 (the parable of the net). What similarities do you find in the two parables? What differences?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- What can you do to be sure those in your family and those you minister to clearly understand what it means to be saved? Will you do it?

2- What can you do to be sure that you, remaining under authority, and without bitterness or contention, can determine and affect what your church does to receive members? Will you?

3- Why is it so important that those who visit your church leave clearly understanding how to be born again? What ways can you as an individual take part in that process?

4- Pray daily for those people in your life or in your church who may not be born again. Do not judge them. Do not try to decide who is and who isn't a Christian, but if you have doubts at all, pray for them. God knows. And He wants you to pray.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Matthew 13:39-43

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
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