

The Parable of the Weeds

What Happens to the Wicked in the End?

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Jesus, Parables, Judgment, Hell

Introduction

As this parable begins, Jesus is still sitting in the boat, a short distance from the shoreline, teaching the crowds who are standing on the beach (13:1-2). He is teaching them in parables. As he sat teaching them from the boat, he taught them seven or eight parables. This parable is the second parable that Jesus taught them from the boat (vs.24-30). Later, after going inside the house, Jesus explained the parable in private to his disciples (vs.36-43).

This parable appears only in Matthew.

The disciples call this parable, "*the parable of the weeds of the field*" (v.36). This title reveals the focus of this parable. This parable is primarily about the weeds and what happens to them in the end. Yes, it is about the kingdom of heaven, but the emphasis is on the role of the weeds in the kingdom.



The Parable (v.24-30)

Look at verse 24.

Matthew 13:24 (ESV) He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,

Jesus "*put another parable before them...*" The 'them' refers to the crowds. He uses an agricultural example. In order to understand this, we must get into the weed.

The "*kingdom of heaven may be compared to...*" Jesus is using common, agricultural illustration, in the form of a parable, to teach truth about the kingdom of heaven. He is taking an image, an common experience from the world, that everyone has seen and using it to teach truth about the kingdom of heaven, which everyone has not seen. It is similar to but not exactly like the very common events of this agricultural story of a man who *sowed good seed in his field*. Everyone has seen this.

Matthew 13:25 (ESV) but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

Under the cover of night, a sneaky *enemy came sowed* bad seed (v.25). The enemy came and "*sowed weeds among the wheat*." He didn't set the field on fire or fill it with rocks or pour poison on it. Rather he simply sowed weedy seeds and *went away*. The enemy snuck in unseen, sowed bad seed, and then snuck away. This is easy to imagine even if the crowds had never personally witnessed this.

Matthew 13:26 (ESV) So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.

For a while, as the two plants grew together. They looked the same. [Darnel looks like wheat.] But the wheat began to mature and bear grain then the weeds become visible also. The good seed yielded good grain, but the bad seed does not yield anything good. The workers of the master who were watching over the field can now tell the difference.

Matthew 13:27 (ESV) And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?'

The servants go to the master, upon making this discovery, go to their master and ask him how this could have happened since they know the master sowed good seed. The master knows what has happened.

Matthew 13:28 (ESV) He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'

This terrible situation is the result of *an enemy*. The servants then ask what he wants them to do. They assume he will want them to immediately pluck up the weeds. However, the master does not want this.

Matthew 13:29 (ESV) But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.

The master is concerned that presently uprooting the bad weeds will also uproot the future fruitfulness of the good grain. The roots of both the good grain and the bad weeds will by this

time become intertwined such that pulling up one will also pull up the other. This would end the productivity of the good grain. The master does not want the greater produce of grain cut short before it has reached the fullness of its ripe yield (or fruitfulness).

Matthew 13:30 (ESV) Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."""

The master instructs the servants to wait and "**let both grow together until the harvest.**" The problem of the presence of the weeds will be dealt with at the harvest. When the grain is fully ripe, then the weeds will be gathered first, and removed, next the grain will be gathered. The weeds are useless and unfruitful and so they will be **burned** in the fire, while the good grain will be gathered into the **barn** and later used as a blessing for him for whom it was planted and harvested.

The Meaning of the Parable (v.36-43)

Later Jesus, "**left the crowds and when inside the house**" (v.36). While there in the privacy of the house, his "**disciples came to him**" asked Jesus for an explanation. The disciples wanted to know the meaning of the parable. They understood that he was not merely teaching a lesson about farming. He doing much more than that and they yearned to understand what Jesus was truly talking about. So they asked for an explanation (v.36). Jesus then explained that for which several, but not all, of the many elements in the story stood. Jesus only offered this explanation to his disciples who were following him and were close to him.

- Sower of good seed = **Son of man** (v.37). The title "Son of Man," is a reference to Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew has used this title seven times so far in this gospel and every time it has been on the lips of Jesus speaking about himself (Mt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40).
- Field = **world** (v.38). This parable points to the truth that the kingdom of heaven does not merely include Israel alone, but includes people from around the world. The kingdom of heaven is intended by Jesus to include people from all over the world. Jesus is not merely a national Savior, but rather he is a global savior.
- Good seed = **sons of kingdom** [of heaven v.24]. In this parable, 'seed' represents people, not the message, as it did in "the parable of the Sower." Jesus plants in all the world people whom he welcomes as, "sons of the kingdom" (v.38), which he intends for them to bear fruit.
- Weeds = "**son of the evil one**" (v.38). Again, these represent people, not words. Note, there is one called "the evil one" and he has "sons."

- Enemy = *devil* (v.39). The wicked weeds of the world are wicked people in the world and they are the work of the enemy, who is the devil. The devil is the one who deceitfully works in the darkness among the people of the world to undermine and destroy the work of Jesus in the world.
- Harvest = *the end of the age* (i.e. final judgment). Time will come to an end. Judgment will really come.
- Reapers = *angels*. There really are angels, mighty spiritual beings, who are the servants of Jesus, helping him to do his will.
- Meaning: there is similarity between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God. There is correspondence between the physical world we do see and the spiritual world that we do not see.
 - Just as a farmer sends out his workers into the field to remove from the harvest the crops that are bad and diseased, so Jesus will send out his angels into his world to remove from the soul-harvest those who are evil and defiled.
 - Just as weeds are burned with fire in the fields of man, so the souls of the unrighteousness and unlawful will be burned with fire in the kingdom of God.
 - Dissimilarity: weeds are quickly consumed in the fire on earth. However, this is not so in the "*fiery furnace*" (v.42) of hell. The weeds are not conscious of their torment, while the souls of the wicked are conscious of their torment. Jesus clearly teaches, "*in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (v.42). Only conscious people "weep" and only conscious people "gnash their teeth."

The Application

More than half of the explanation Jesus offers is dedicated to explaining what happens at the end of the age. Within that half, the primary emphasis falls upon the "*sons of the evil one.*"

- Jesus here explicitly reveals that *God's kingdom is intended to extend beyond the nation of Israel*. Recall that God's original promise to Abraham was that through his "*offspring, all families and nations of the earth would be blessed*" (Gn 12:3, 18:18). The kingdom of heaven will include people from all around the world. The Son of Man goes into all the world "*seeking to save the lost,*"¹ not only in Israel alone, but among non-Israelis also.

¹ Luke 19:10.

- The **devil** is a real being who is an enemy of Jesus and all who follow him. The **Statement of Faith** of this church states this:

We believe in the existence of Satan, sin and evil powers, and that all these have been defeated by God in the cross of Christ. Satan actively continues his work in the world as the prince of the power of the air.

- The devil is not an imaginary idea, but rather a very real spiritual being.
 - Jesus called him *"the ruler of this world"* (Jn 12:31; 14:30).
 - Paul called him *"the god of this world"* (2 Cor 4:4).
 - Paul called him *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Eph 2:2).
 - John wrote, *"the whole world lies in the power of the evil one"* (1 Jn 5:19).²
- There are **two kingdoms** of which all people belong. There is the kingdom of God and there is the kingdom of the devil. You get to choose which kingdom is your home. No one is automatically in the kingdom of God. Jesus said to his fellow Israelis, *"You are of your father the devil"* (Jn 8:44) and that only those *"who abide in my word"* are truly his disciples (Jn 8:31). You can tell which kingdom you are in by looking at who the king is whom you are obeying. Are you obeying Jesus? Or are you obeying someone other than Jesus?
- The **Son of Man has final authority over the kingdom of heaven**. The Son of Man *"will send out his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all..."* (v.41). The angels of heaven do what **Jesus** tells them to do. The heavenly "kingdom of the Father" (v.43) is the same kingdom as the kingdom ruled by the Son of Man. *"All authority"* (Mt 28:18) over the kingdom of heaven has been *"handed over to Son by the Father"* (Mt 11:27). Jesus is the one who judges who enters heaven and who does not (Mt 7:21-23 *"Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven..."* If you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, then you must go to Jesus.
- The **kingdom has come in part in the present, but it will come in fullness in the future**. The work of God in the world has begun, but the work of the enemy is allowed to also continue. The work of the enemy could be immediately eliminated, but Jesus has not chosen to immediately remove from the world either the devil or his wicked followers. Jesus (and his mighty angels) clearly has power over the devil. However, he has chosen to **delay** the completely destruction of the devil and his evil followers *"until the harvest,"* the end of time, which is the final judgment. There is a delay, but their condemnation is certain.
- The **weeds look like the wheat up to a point**. For a season they look alike, but eventually they will be exposed for truly what they are. According to Jesus there are only two kinds of

² Satan himself confessed as much about "all the kingdoms of the world," while tempting Jesus saying to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will" (Luke 4:6).

people in the world, sons of the evil one and sons of the kingdom; you are either a child of the devil or a child of God.

- The **judgment at the end of the age is eternally determinative**. There are two destinations for every soul. The one is represented by the *barn* while the other is represented by the *burning*; the fruitfulness of heaven, or the horror of "*fiery furnace*" of hell. There will come a day when "the Son of Man" will remove out of his kingdom all "*causes of sin and all law-breakers*" and he will give the command that those people be through into "*the fiery furnace*" where there is "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (v.41-42).
 - Why "weeping?" Regret. You could have enjoy life through Jesus, but you reject him. Sorrow. You could have had happiness in Jesus, but you did believe he could give it to you. Loss. Heaven could have been yours, but you chose hell in stead.
 - Why "gnashing of teeth?" Intense agony. Unbearable pain. The temporal agony of this world is nothing to be compared to the eternal agony of the next, IF you go into eternity without having your sins atoned for by the blood of Jesus.
 - When the wicked die they do not cease from their sorrow, it is rather multiplied 10,000 times. Death for the law-breakers is not the ceasing of suffering, but rather the intensification of suffering. When unrepentant sinners die they do not "go to a better place." They go to an infinitely worse place! It is a demonic lie from the pit of hell that whispers into the hear of the sinner, when life is hard and filled with disappointment, "Just end your life now and this suffering will be over." That is a demonic lie. Your suffering will **not** be over, it will have just begun. He who has ears, let him hear.
- This parable points to a **connection** between the sons of the kingdom of heaven and the sons of the devil. If God were to remove all evil people from the world, he would also have to remove all good people form this world. Jesus delays the removal of evil people from the kingdom of his world for his own good purposes. He is in control of when the end of the age comes.
 - He delays because he is patient, giving sinners time to repent.
- "**The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.**" Not "*my Father*" but "*their Father.*" Suddenly now the "sons of the kingdom" are also "sons of the Father." The sons and daughters of the kingdom are now related to Jesus. Faithfully persevering through this wicked world will cause the glory of God to shine more brightly through his sons and daughters. Living through all the evil that Satan can throw at you and still choosing to love righteousness more, glorifies God and his goodness in way that would not be seen in world in which evil was absent.

Conclusion

If you are an unbeliever, do not mistake God's grace in delaying his judgment as disinterest in or approval of your sin and wickedness. Jesus is quite clear. One day the wicked will be gathered up, condemned, and cast into the fiery furnace. God is delaying to give you time to repent of your sins and turn whole-heartedly to him. Repent now. Turn to Jesus in faith today. He will receive all who turn to him in truth.

If you are a believer, do not allow your family, friends, and coworkers to mistakenly believe that all people go to heaven or that God would never condemn to hell those who are wicked. Do not allow the lost people of this world to believe that when they die their suffering is over. This parable says otherwise.

There will one day be soul-harvest. Jesus will one day separate the weeds from the wheat. The weeds will be burned while the wheat will be gathered into the barn. Then the righteous will shine like the sun as they reflect the greater glory of Jesus.

Will you shine like the Son for all eternity in the kingdom of light or will you suffer with Satan for eternity in the kingdom of darkness?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do think Jesus only explains parables to his disciples and not to crowds?
2. What are the implications of the fact that the field represents the world?
3. What two kinds of people are described in this parable describe?
4. What does the harvest represent? What happens during the harvest?
5. What do the weeds represent? What finally happens to the weeds?
6. What answer does this parable give to the question of why the wicked are not immediately removed from the world?
7. Does Jesus in this parable teach that hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment? Why or why not?
8. Into what are those who "cause sin" and are "law-breakers" thrown? What do the terms "fiery furnace" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" communicate about the destiny of the wicked?
9. How are the righteous described in this parable? How is the kingdom to which they belong described?