

Sabotage: Weeds among the Wheat

Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

Intro. Last time we considered the **Parable of the Sower** which illustrates the various ways people like us respond to the Gospel, or the message of the kingdom. Just as 3/4ths of the seed was wasted on soil that was hard / shallow / or choked with weeds...most Gospel proclamation and Bible teaching is met with unbelief and wasted. Because this is the case, nowhere does the NT encourage us to expect Christianity to over-take the world. Only after Christ's return and the judgment of the nations, will everyone entering the Kingdom be righteous. Until Christ returns, the task of believers is to continue the work of Jesus by sowing the precious seed of God's Word. But as we discovered last time, only those with tender and receptive hearts will receive it. So the **parable of the sower** answers the question...*How will the kingdom of heaven advance or progress in the world?* It progresses by way of Gospel preaching and teaching and by believers who share the knowledge of the truth they possess. Yet the **parable of the sower** also reveals the way **the message of the Kingdom** is hindered by the inner resistance of hearts unwilling to receive it.

The next three parables continue to focus on resistance or opposition to the Kingdom. Through **the parable of the weeds**, Jesus explains that during this age between His first and second comings, Satan is actively engaged in a strategy of sabotage. The parable illustrates the fact that two sowers are at work in the world (not just one) and two kinds of seed are planted which produce two kinds of crops. Then at harvest time, a judgment will take place resulting in two distinct destinies. In other words, the purpose of Jesus in sowing the message of the kingdom...has an evil counterpart. If the first parable illustrates the inward resistance of unwilling hearts...the second illustrates the outward resistance and spiritual warfare that characterizes the church age. When taken together, these first two parables illustrate the opposition the kingdom of Heaven encounters from both sinful humanity and a satanic hierarchy. Since this parable was also interpreted by Jesus, we'll consider first *the Parable / the Parable's Interpretation / and then the Parable's Applications*.

I. The Parable - vs. 24-30 - Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "'No,' He answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

This second parable begins like the first one. A **sower**, or a farmer, goes out to plant seed with the intention of reaping a good harvest. Then, under the cover of darkness, when everyone was asleep, an enemy, specifically called, **his enemy** (or the enemy of the sower) sowed weeds among the wheat and then goes away. The specific **weeds** spoken of here are a worthless nuisance the KJV calls **tares**. This poisonous species commonly found in the Middle East, is probably *the bearded darnel*. Yet here's the thing...in its early stages of growth, the darnel is almost indistinguishable from wheat. Only when the two organisms reach maturity does the difference become more apparent. Not only were these Galileans familiar with weeds, but they knew a field could be sabotaged by darnel seeds. This was a cruel but effective way to take vengeance on an enemy and Roman law prohibited it. Some weeds are very hard to get rid of. Am I right? Weeds can overpower whatever good crop a farmer might plant. (I've often wondered if several of you are scattering dandelion seeds on my front lawn while we're sleeping.)

So according to **v. 26**, the wheat and weeds **grew together** and nobody noticed until the wheat was mature and ready for harvest. That's when the servants made an alarming discovery. *"Master, your wheat is corrupted by darnel! Where did it come from? Were darnel seeds mixed in with the wheat you planted?"* The answer implied is "No"...there was nothing wrong with the seed the owner sowed. *"Where then, did the weeds come from?"* In **v. 28** the land owner said, **An enemy did this!** *"My crops were sabotaged! Surely this was the menacing work of an adversary."* Eager to please their master the servants asked, *"What do you want us to do?"* **Do you want us to go and pull them up? Should we order some of those "weed poppers" advertized on QVC?** Their master said, **"No! Don't do that! Your zeal is commendable, but misguided. The roots of the tares and the wheat tend to become intertwined. In the process of rooting out the tares, some of the wheat will be pulled out too."**

One spring Peggy and I planted a garden and then with our family, left on vacation. When we returned we couldn't tell the difference between the weeds and the vegetables we planted. Working as a team, I pulled out the carrots Peggy planted and Peggy pulled out the leaf lettuce I planted. That year we had tomatoes, but not much else! My point is this...it's often difficult to see the difference between weeds and good plants while the two are growing side by side...especially when you're a gardening ignoramus. But listen, some weeds can actually adapt to mimic plants near them.

Speaking from experience the land-owner said...**Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time the organisms are more readily distinguished. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."** The **harvesters** would then have the skills to separate the one from the other.

So that's the parable. Under the cover of darkness, an enemy sabotaged a farmer's field by introducing an alien seed. As the weeds grew next to the wheat, they looked just like the wheat. Because the two couldn't be easily distinguished, the landowner told his workers to let them grow together until harvest time to avoid damaging the wheat in the process of uprooting the weeds. So what does the parable mean? I'm glad you asked. For the time being, let's hop over next two parables to see the interpretation Jesus gave in **vs. 36-43**.

II. The Parable's Interpretation - vs. 36-43 - Then He left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Away from the crowds in the privacy of a house, the disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable of the weeds. Even though Jesus didn't explain the meaning of every parable, He interpreted this one for our benefit. Except for a few slight variations, the elements in the first parable have the same meaning in the second parable. Like the first parable, **the sower** is the **Son of Man**. The **Sower** is Jesus who continues to establish His Kingdom on earth through the efforts of His followers. Jesus told Peter **I will build my Church**.

Again, like the previous parable, **the field** represents the world. This is where some bible interpreters get off track. They suggest the **field** is the Church...the kingdom in its current spiritual form.

According to this view, the parable is a warning that unbelievers would infiltrate the ranks of the church. While there's truth to this and the NT sounds this warning, it isn't the primary interpretation. In **v.38** Jesus said very plainly, **the field is the world**. Believers or **sons of the kingdom** are never said to belong to the world. Instead, we have a ministry in and to the world while not being of it! And notice in **v. 24**...the field is called **His field**. **The field** bears the distinction of belonging to the sower. **Psa. 24:1** says, **The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...** That the Lord of heaven created and owns everything is "*an inconvenient truth*" most have chosen to ignore. Secularism is a lie Satan inspired and perpetrated to subvert the truth and eliminate God as creator and owner of His Universe. The benefit of secularism is the absence of accountability. If there is no God, there is no sin or fear of judgment. Most would rather believe this lie than receive the truth.

As we found in the **parable of the sower**, the seed represents the message of the kingdom or the Word of God. But in this second parable there's an interesting variation. Here the **good seed** refers to the **sons of the kingdom**...to people of faith who with good hearts, receive the Word. The fact that **seed** can refer to both the Word of God and the people of God is explained by the fact that the life in the seed of God's Word is the very life produced in us when we receive it. In the process of time, people who order their lives by God's Word, take on the life of its author! So, the Lord Jesus plants His believing sons and daughters precisely where He wants them in the world. This is His program and what is meant in **Eph. 4:7, 8** which says, **But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."** vs. **11, 12** then add, **It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...**

As Jesus continued to explain the meaning of the parable He said, **the weeds** are **sons of the evil one**. In other words, Satan is working His program too. He positions counterfeits and heretics in places of influence. He plants people who outwardly appear to be sons of the kingdom in places where they can effectively interfere and compete with Christ's kingdom program.

Earlier in **Matt. 7:15** Jesus warned of false prophets who would come among the sheep as wolves in sheep's clothing. In **Acts 20** Paul encouraged the elders at Ephesus to keep watch over the flock because after his departure, savage wolves would infiltrate the flock. Then in **II Cor. 11:13-15** he warned the Corinthians of deceivers who would come disguised as apostles of Christ and servants of righteousness. **For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.** So during the course of this age until Jesus returns there are many religious deceivers. We must not be naive about this. We need to understand that the competition between truth and error...good and evil...light and darkness...isn't coincidental...it's intentional! While Jesus is working His kingdom program of salvation, Satan is working his anti-kingdom program of sabotage. For every son of the kingdom Jesus plants, Satan plants counterfeits...sons of the evil one. Again, speaking very plainly, Jesus said, **the enemy is the devil - v. 39**. Satan is the archenemy of God and His people and he works through deception and sabotage.

In this same verse Jesus also identified **the harvest** as **the end of the age**. The **end of the age** is that period immediately following the Great Tribulation when Christ returns to judge the nations and establish His kingdom on earth. Jesus spoke of this coming judgment in **Matt. 24:29-31**- **"Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn.**

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Paul also wrote of Christ's glorious return in **II Thess. 1:6-10a - God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.**

Jesus went on to say, **the harvesters are the angels.** This agrees perfectly with **Matt. 24:31; II Thess. 1:7;** and **Rev.19:14.** The pulling out of the weeds or the **weeding out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil** refers to this coming judgment when angels will separate the **sons of the evil one** from **the sons of the kingdom.** At the end of the age, believers will go into the Millennial Kingdom and the unbelieving will be cast out of Christ's kingdom. This is **Matt. 25.** And just like the destiny of worthless weeds, those not made righteous by Christ's salvation, will suffer in the flames of everlasting punishment. You see, the Good News, though not included in this parable, is that God is in the business of turning weeds into wheat! At one time, every one of us was unbelieving and a son of the evil one. **Eph. 2:2** says, we all **followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.** The difference between the two classes of humanity is our response to message of the kingdom which is the gospel of grace. **Eph. 2:8** says, **For by grace we are saved through faith.** By faith in Jesus Christ we were **rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves...- Col. 1:13.**

Now we need to be attentive here. Jesus is here talking about Hell and everlasting punishment. Hell isn't something people fear or believe in anymore. The pulpits of America have gone silent on the subject. Thought it's not socially or intellectually acceptable to speak of Hell...the fact remains, the Bible says there is such a place. And just as Jesus is preparing a place for all who trust Him, Hell is prepared for Satan and for every person who actively or by default allies themselves with him by rejecting God's Savior-King, Jesus Christ. Did you know that *"Jesus spoke more about Hell and how to stay out of it than He did about Heaven and how to get into it?"* It's true. The interpretation Jesus gave in **Matt.13** is to be taken literally. The **fire** of Hell is no different than the fire we're familiar with. The pain of burning in Hell's fire is no different than the terrible pain of burns you and have suffered ...except for this...the pain of Hell is without remedy and unending. The **weeping** of Hell refers to emotional agony. The **gnashing of teeth** refers to physical agony. The fact that both are happening in Hell prove that souls after death will be in conscious torment even as the rich man was in **Luke 16.**

Yet according to **v.43** - at the end of the age, when the sons of the evil one are uprooted and punished, the sons of the kingdom will shine as we never did before. The righteous will be glorified in **the Kingdom of their Father...**a literal kingdom established on earth. But the unrighteous will be expelled and punished.

Once again, as He did in **v.9**, Jesus ended this parable with the admonition, **He who has ears, let him hear.** In other words, if you have the spiritual capacity to hear and understand these words, then do it. If you believe the Word of God is true...then embrace these words as factual! So this second parable, along with the first one, focuses on **the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.** It refers to the period of time between the first and second comings of Christ and conditions on earth today.

The Kingdom of Heaven refers to Christ's rule over this earthly sphere presently under Satan's control. The **Kingdom of Heaven** in its present mystery form is the Church on earth...its Jews and Gentiles who have trusted Jesus Christ to save them. The parable teaches that during this age, Satan is planting evil counterfeits to oppose and sabotage the work of Christ. And from outward appearances, those who are false are virtually indistinguishable from those who are true. This isn't coincidental. It's the premeditated work of the adversary who as a master of disguise is determined to take to Hell as many he can. Because our vision is limited to outward appearances, we often lack the insight necessary to distinguish who's who. But God sees every heart. He knows who belong to Him and who doesn't. Because of this, we're not to judge or attempt to weed out the unrighteous from the righteous. With respect to the world, our business is evangelizing not judging. Our business is the same as Jesus who said He did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. – **Jn. 3:17**

In a context of church discipline, Paul wrote, **What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. - I Cor. 5:12, 13** So we should never attempt to weed out or separate the righteous from the unrighteous. To do this would certainly inflict damage to good plants in God's field...especially to those who are young in the faith. The business of judging and separating belongs to the angels at the end of the age.

III. The Parable's Applications – As we finish, I think it's fair to ask why it's important for disciples then and now to know these things. The first reason may relate to a latin proverb that insists, *"to be forewarned is to be forearmed."* As believers who have taken our stand with Jesus Christ, we need to understand what's going on in the world. We need to recognize the nature of the struggle we're in. The Church has been far too naive with regard to secular teachers and professors. The number of young people who have turned from the faith under their influence is staggering and tragic. If we took the warning of this parable more seriously, we would be more discerning in the schools we recommend to our young people. Another contemporary mistake is made by those who believe everything promoted on the internet. Satan uses the dark side of technology to full advantage as he competes for the souls of men. In **Eph. 6:12** Paul wrote, **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** As Paul explained in **Eph. 6**, this spiritual battle we're in requires that we fight in the Lord's wisdom and strength, not our own.

But there's a second reason. Living in this world of turmoil, believers must have the right attitude and approach to people who oppose and reject our Savior. In **Matt. 7:1** Jesus said, **Do not judge, or you too will be judged.** While it's right to judge behavior God has already judged and Church discipline is a separate matter altogether, it's not our business to pass judgment or condemn sinners. This is God's business, not ours! Human nature wants to sanction / punish / or eliminate any who disagree or misbehave. This *"turn or burn"* attitude showed up among the first disciples and it still weakens the effectiveness of the Church today. You may remember that James and John wanted to call down fire on a village that didn't welcome Jesus. (**Lk. 9:54, 55**) Needless to say, Jesus rebuked them. Study the Spanish Inquisitions and the Crusades sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church. It wasn't our brand of Christianity that committed these atrocities, but they happened in Christ's name. So when Islam declares a holy war against infidels who refuse to denounce Christ and worship Allah, we who object have some historical egg on our faces. These things shouldn't have happened. In fact, every attempt to judge or eliminate unbelievers from God's field is forbidden by this parable. Instead, Jesus said, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. Now watch this closely...He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. - Matt. 5:44, 45.** God responds to sinful humanity with unconditional love and mercy. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and He sends His rain on the weeds as well as the wheat. We're called to be like Him.

So through this parable, **sons of the kingdom** are urged to love the way our King loves. Judgment day is coming...this certain...but today isn't that day. How can we ever hope to succeed in influencing others to trust Christ while condemning and censoring everybody who presently refuses Him? How will people ever know the love of God when the vibes they sense from believers are so hostile and condemning? It's tricky business to hate the sin while loving the sinner...but that's what we're called to do. We must take a stand for righteousness as we gently try to lift the fallen.

Finally, this parable suggests a personal application that prepares us for the Lord's Table. In

II Cor. 13:5 Paul wrote, **Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.**

We tend to look at the other guy...the one seated next to us...with suspicion, but the Lord says to His Church, **examine yourselves**. If there's no spiritual fruit in our lives, we had better check to see if we really have life from above. All too many go through the motions of Christianity without the essential faith necessary to salvation. So I ask you, was there a time when you prayed, *"Lord Jesus, I believe that you alone have the power to save me from sin. Please cleanse me, make me new and become the Lord of my life. I want to flourish and be fruitful like the wheat planted in your field."*