

"Weeds Among the Wheat"

Background Scripture: Matthew 13:24-43 **Devotional Reading:** 2 Corinthians 13:1-10

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 (NIV)

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "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?'

²⁸ "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ 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.'"

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³⁶ 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."

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear."

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To summarize the parable of the weeds.
- **Biblical Principle:** To compare and contrast the parable of the weeds with the parable of the sower (last week's lesson).
- **Daily Application:** To be diligent so that we and all whom we love are harvested as wheat.

LESSON CONTEXT

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" occurs 32 times in the Gospel of Matthew. This is equivalent to the phrase "kingdom of God" as used dozens of times in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John but rarely in Matthew (see Matthew 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). The kingdom of Heaven/kingdom of God is not defined by territory or government apparatus. It does not levy taxes or conscript (draft) people for military service. This kingdom is where God reigns as king; it is the dominion of His authority. There is no limit to this potential, for, as the psalmist taught, "The Lord Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2; compare 83:18; 97:9). The psalmist affirms the nature of God with the repeated acknowledgment that "the Lord reigns" (Psalms 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called people to repentance and preparation for the coming of this kingdom; they warned that it was "near" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Later, Jesus stated that His ministry of casting out demons signaled that the kingdom had come into the midst of humanity (12:28). The arrival of the kingdom was something for which Jesus and His disciples had prayed (6:10).

Jesus' disciples often heard Him speak about the kingdom of Heaven/kingdom of God, and they were astonished and confused by His descriptions of its nature (Matthew 19:23–25). Much of their reaction can be traced to the fact that Jesus' kingdom parables were metaphorical (figurative) in nature regarding aspects of the kingdom. Characteristically, these kingdom parables begin, "The kingdom of heaven is like ...;" the majority of those are found in Matthew 13. The lesson text of the parable of the weeds among the wheat is the first time Jesus uses this introductory phrase in the Gospel of Matthew.

Weeds With the Wheat: Matthew 13:24–30

This *parable* involves sowing *seed*, as did the first parable in this chapter of Matthew 13. The practice of sowing seed in a preindustrial era involved spreading it by hand. Wheat and barley were the staple grains planted in this way.

An *enemy* of the farmer now appears in the story. The *weeds* that the enemy *sowed* translates a Greek word that refers to a weed known as darnel (technical name: *Lolium temulentum*). It looks very much like wheat until it matures. These are not weeds that merely threaten the growth of the crop; rather, these are weeds easily confused with the crop itself. Ingesting darnel can cause nausea, leading some to call it “poison wheat.”

Wheat was a vitally important field crop in the ancient world, being the primary ingredient of bread—the dietary staple (see Deuteronomy 32:13–14; Psalm 147:12–14). Further, the farming operation here is more than a single family; the *men* who slept worked for the landowner.

There is nothing negligent implied about the men being asleep. Jesus’ point is that the second sower comes at night so that he can work in darkness and secret as criminals tend to do (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:2). The introduction of this enemy’s “bad seed” would have been undetectable at this point in the planting and harvest cycle.

1. After the sowing of good seed, what happened during the night while the men slept? (Matthew 13:24–25)

At first, the two kinds of plants seem identical. But their differences become more apparent with time. Eventually *the servants* discern that their *field* is infested with weeds. Unlike the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–23), all the soil in this parable is fertile; it has readily received both *good seed* and bad. Not until the *heads* (fruit) appears do the servants recognize the weeds among the wheat. So the servants inform the owner about the weeds and ask how the situation had arisen.

2. What did the servants observe as the seeds began to grow? (Matthew 13:26–27)

The owner knows what has happened. The enemy has done this. So the servants ask, what should we do? Should we go and gather them up? The servants’ response is in line with conventional wisdom: there’s no room for indifference where weeds are concerned. Every hour they live means that they are drawing water and nutrients away from the good plants, in addition to blocking sunlight. Surely the master will agree that the weeds must be dealt with immediately!

The wise owner rejects the servants’ suggestion. He knows that the roots of the plants are now entangled. Therefore pulling out the weeds risks inadvertently pulling out a substantial number of *wheat* stalks at the same time—weeding is bound to cause collateral damage. It is best to wait, and let them both grow together until time of harvest. Then he will have them separated. No doubt, many in Jesus’ audience undoubtedly found this to be surprising.

3. How did the owner respond to the servants regarding the weeds? (Matthew 13:28–30)

Wicked With the Righteous: Matthew 13:36–43

Jesus’ disciples found His parable to be surprising as well! Having already been given a private interpretation of the meaning of the sower parable (Matthew 13:18–23), Jesus’ *disciples* also wanted to know the meaning to *the parable of the weeds in the field*. With Jesus having *left the crowd*, they are back in *the house* (see 13:1–2). So they ask Him.

4. What did Jesus’ disciples think of His parable? (Matthew 13:36)

Jesus began His explanation and reveals that the sower *is the Son of man*—a self-identification that occurs dozens of times in the four Gospels. But in contrast to the parable of the sower, *the good seed* is not the Word of God, but the children of God, you and I. (See verse 38.). *The Kingdom of heaven* refers to the church (also see v. 24), which is the subject of these parables. The *enemy* is Satan, and the *weeds* are false converts.

The field upon which both good and bad seed falls is not a local plot of land, but rather is global in scope (compare John 3:16). This has inspired and motivated countless evangelists and missionaries in the history of the church. The idea that the field *is the world* means there are no limits on the need for evangelistic endeavors. Even the most closed countries, those with laws that make Christian evangelism illegal, are still the “field” where the word must be preached.

5. How did Jesus explain the parable to the disciples? (Matthew 13:37-38)

What Do You Think?

How will you support evangelists and missionaries in sowing the gospel message throughout the “field” of the world?

Digging Deeper

What specialized training do you need in order to support this work or take part in the work yourself?

Jesus went on to explain, in a roundabout way that Satan cannot uproot the plants (true Christians), so he plants counterfeit Christians in their midst...we must beware of Satan’s counterfeits (2 Corinthians 11:26) who believe a counterfeit gospel (Galatians 1:6-9).

In the beginning of the story we see that the good seeds sprung up and brought forth *heads* (fruit) (see v. 26), emphasizing that the true converts produce fruitful lives. By contrast, the false (professing) converts produce no lasting fruit. It should be noted that a “fruit” is something which God must produce in us by His power (Gal. 5:22).

The servants, *harvesters* are the angels, who questioned what could be done with the weeds (Matt. 13:27-28). *The harvest is the end of the age* (world) and also described as such in Revelation 14:15; which also affirms *the harvesters* to be *angels*.

6. How did Jesus explain what happened in the story (or will happen)? (Matthew 13:39-40)

In verse 40 Jesus states that He will send forth His angels to gather the weeds and burn them. The verbal image of sheaves of weeds being *burned* corresponds to the judgment of “the people of the evil one” (Matthew 13:38). The angels will deliver them to eternal punishment (Revelation 14:16–20). This final judgment is more than an event scheduled for the end of a *period* of time. It is *the end* of time!

No one would desire this eternity, for it will be a place of *weeping* in pain and despair. Jesus dramatized this as a time of *gnashing of teeth*, a tight grimace of the mouth as a way to endure agony (compare Matthew 8:12). But there will be no relief. Satan, his demonic angels, and his earthly followers will experience eternal banishment from the presence of God at the final judgment.

7. What did Jesus say would happen to the weeds? (Matthew 13:40-42)

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who said that this parable describes a impulsive and spiteful God?

Digging Deeper

How can you dig deeper into the nature of God, nature of man, and the nature of sin—with Scriptures like Isaiah 55:6–7; John 3:16-18; 2 Peter 3:9?

The future for the wheat—the children of the kingdom—stands as completely different. They will not suffer eternal, punishing fire, but will have an inner glory, an eternal fire that allows them to *shine like the sun* (compare Daniel 12:3). They will be rewarded with a place in the final fellowship of the saved, *the kingdom of their Father*. This will be the eternal community in which there is no mixing of wheat and weeds, righteous and wicked. Only the *righteous* will find this resting place.

Jesus ends with an admonition that occurs dozens of times in Psalms, the Prophets, and the New Testament... “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” Jesus is not referring to physical ears on the sides of

one's head, but to hearts attuned for hearing, believing, and obeying spiritual truth. The ones who *hear* in this manner will be like the wise man who chose a foundation of rock for his new house (Matthew 7:24–25).

8. What will happen to those described as “wheat” (Matthew 13:43)?

What Do You Think?

How can believers prioritize the health of their “spiritual ears”?

Digging Deeper

How can believers transition from hearing Scripture to obeying Scripture (see James 1:19–27)?

CONCLUSION

The Wicked Among the Holy

The parable of the weeds among the wheat explains one of the greatest mysteries of the kingdom: why God allows the wicked to prosper alongside His holy people. The parable teaches us that God is aware of wickedness, but He chooses to leave such wickedness unjudged for the time being. God is neither oblivious to wickedness nor does His allowing the wicked to continue indicate His tacit (silent) approval.

To followers of God who are mixed among those who reject God, the point of the parable of the weeds among the wheat must not be lost: the presence of the wicked among us is temporary. We, like the prophet Habakkuk, wonder at the silence of the Lord when “the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Habakkuk 1:13).

Even so, Jesus taught in this parable that God is not oblivious to these injustices. But we should not be in more of a hurry for the wicked to be punished than He is (2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 6:10). We should remember that if God took immediate vengeance on a person with every sin committed, we, the children of the kingdom, would be punished on a daily basis. God's timing is just that: a plan that He determines and controls in ways beyond our understanding. The “harvest” of the wicked and the righteous will come in God's good time.

We must hope and pray for final, ultimate justice. We must be diligent that we and all whom we love are harvested as wheat, not weeds.

What Do You Think?

How would you retell this parable for a modern audience? What would you need to adjust for your specific audience?

Digging Deeper

What advantages are there in communicating eternal spiritual truths through stories and analogies?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, and Lord of the harvest, may we be the good seed that produces abundance in the field of Your world. May we be ones who are unwilling to give up on those who seem wicked. May we not despair when evil seems to win the day. We believe the promise that Your time of final judgment will allow the righteous to shine as the sun. We look forward to that day with faith and anticipation. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen!

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

You're either wheat or weed. There is no in-between!