

## Growing Together

Lesson for July 23, 2023

**Unit II:** Jesus Envisions the Kingdom

**Scriptural Background:** Matthew 13:24-43

**Printed Text:** Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

*Key Verse: “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.” (Matthew 13:30, NIV)*

Have you ever had a group of guys come to your house & mow your yard? Have you ever noticed that they set their blade as high as it can be? That used to annoy me so much. I would have to pay them to mow it every week. If they would lower the blade, they would cut more & they would mow every other week. But then I started studying about weeds and I found out why they do that.

If you raise a mower blade, it will cut down the weed, but keep your grass at a good height. That way, the grass doesn't have to compete as much with the weeds. They are not overshadowed by the weeds. The best way to get rid of weeds is not to pull them; don't spray them; don't lower your mower blade to cut them down. You choke them out by raising your mower blade. When you raise your blade, you thicken the turf.

*Jason Frazier*

This is the approach that Jesus takes in this week's parable.

### Key Terms

1. **Gnashing** (verse 42) – To grind (one's teeth) together, typically as a sign of anger.
2. **Weeds** (verse 25) – Plants which are undesirable, persistent, damaging and interfere with growth of other crop plants thus affecting human activities, agriculture, natural processes and economy of the country.
3. **Weeping** (verse 42) – Expressing grief, sorrow, or any overwhelming emotion by shedding tears.
4. **Wheat** (verse 29) – A major cereal crop and one of the oldest domesticated grains. In modern times, wheat is used to produce meal, breakfast cereals, and flour for bakery products. It can be cultivated in a wide range of soils but thrives in temperate climates.

## Lesson Background

Parables function in a dual manner. For those who have responded positively to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, the parables convey further insight and knowledge, while for those who have rejected Jesus and his message, the parables have the effect of only darkening the subject further. Thus, belief and commitment lead to further knowledge; unbelief leads to further ignorance.

Jesus says he veils his truth from his foes as punishment for their unbelief (13:13). Jesus speaks in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear and understand. That is, because they failed to heed the evidence they had, Jesus' parables now hide the word, taking it away from people even as they stand before Jesus. Amos says it this way: "*The days are coming,*" declares the Lord, "*when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD*" (Amos 8:11). It is an acute judgment for God to remove his word from people who have heard it and rejected it. They are left with the silence of God.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Weeds Appeared Among the Wheat (Matthew 13:24-26)

This is the second parable (in Matthew 13). Here, is a farmer going out to plant. Of course, he plants good seed, or else it would be a waste of time to plant. We know that we reap what we sow, if we want corn out of the field, we do not plant peas.

The kingdom of heaven is built with the seed of the Word being planted and growing.

**His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat:** This parable describes the work of an **enemy** who tried to destroy the work of the **man who sowed good seed in his field**. The enemy's purpose in sowing **tares among the wheat** was to destroy the wheat. But the wise farmer would not allow the enemy to succeed. Instead, the farmer decided to sort it out at harvest time.

Note that this parable *clearly describes corruption among the people of God*. Just as in the previous parable, the wheat represents the people of God. Some corrupting influence is brought, and an influence that may look genuine even as tares may resemble real wheat.

"The *weeds* are probably darnel, a poisonous plant related to wheat and virtually indistinguishable from it until the ears form." (France) In an agricultural setting, sowing darnel in someone else's wheat field was a way for enemies to destroy someone's livelihood catastrophically. It pictures Satan's efforts to deceive the church by mingling his children with God's, in some cases making it impossible for believers to discern the true from the false.

This sentence is so sad. The wheat are the Christians; and this means that right in the midst of even the church, the enemy sneaks in and plants evil right beside the good. Probably unaware to the owner of the land or the pastor. You see, the farmer (God), would never plant tares. This was an act of the devil himself.

The gospel does not contain a mixture of truth and error that can produce mixed results. False teachings in the church do not come from the Bible. However sincere, human interpretations can sometimes contain a mixture of truth and error. 3 So, believers must pray and examine all teachings about God and Christ in order to make certain these teachings are according to the Bible and true. The Berean Jews set the example for us: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). Jesus Christ, Christians, and the kingdom of heaven have an enemy who will use others in trying to ruin the good work and destroy the good fruit that God wants believers to bear.

This parable represents the present and future state of the gospel church; Christ's care of it, the devil's enmity against it, and the mixture there is in it of good and bad in this world, and the separation between them in the other world.

So prone is fallen man to sin, that if the enemy sows the tares, he may go his way, they will spring up, and do hurt. Whereas, when good seed is sown, it must be tended, watered, and fenced.

## II. Growing Together (Matthew 13:27-30)

The servants complained to their master; Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? No doubt he did; whatever is amiss in the church, we are sure it is not from Christ. Though evildoers, and such as openly oppose the gospel, ought to be separated from the society of the faithful, yet no human skill can make an exact separation.

**An enemy hath done this:** Those who oppose must not be cut off, but instructed, and that with meekness. And though good and bad are together in this world, yet at the great day they shall be parted; then the righteous and the wicked shall be plainly known; here sometimes it is hard to distinguish between them. Let us, knowing the terrors of the Lord, not do iniquity.

There was recognition right off that the devil had been to the field and sown these evil ones. Sometimes the person sitting on the pew beside you in church is not really a believer, but has been placed there by the devil to disrupt what is going on. These believers, here, are asking the Lord, should we throw them out of the church?

The servants asked what could be done with these tares. The owner's servants were experienced enough to distinguish between the wheat and the weeds prior to harvest time. Likewise, from spiritual experience, study of the Bible, and prayer, the Holy Spirit can help the true followers of Jesus recognize false teaching, false teachers, false preachers, and false members in the church.

**Root up the wheat with them:** To uproot them would be to damage the entire crop. The implication seems to be that too much wounding of people's genuineness of faith may damage the saved before it exposes the lost.

**Let both grow together:** indicates that there will always be some false professors among true Christian believers until the "time of harvest" or judgment. Note that the tares are gathered, bound, and burned first, whereas the wheat is gathered into "my barn" (heaven).

**Lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them:** In the interest of preserving and protecting the wheat, the wise farmer did not separate the **tares** from the **wheat** until the time of harvest.

The wise farmer recognized that the ultimate answer to tares among the wheat would only come at the final harvest.

### III. Hear, Ears, Hear (Matthew 13:36-43)

**Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field:** In His explanation, Jesus made it clear what the different figures in the parable represent.

- The **field** represents the **world**.
- The **good seeds** represent God's true people, the **sons of the kingdom**.
- The **tares** represent false believers in the world, **the sons of the wicked one**, who (like tares among wheat) may superficially look like God's true people.

The parable of the tares changes the figures slightly from the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3-9; 13:18-23). In the parable of the soils, the seed represented the Word of God; here it represents true believers. The point of the parables is completely different; the parable of the soils shows how men receive and respond to the Word of God, and the parable of the tares of the field shows how God will divide His true people from false believers at the end of this age.

"Satan has a shoot of iniquity for every shoot of grace; and, when God revives his work, Satan revives his also." (Clarke)

This parable powerfully teaches that it is *God's* job to divide in judgment. "Magistrates and churches may remove the openly wicked from their society; the outwardly good who are inwardly worthless they must leave; for the judging of hearts is beyond their sphere." (Spurgeon) iv. "Jesus announced God's kingdom, and this would lead many of his hearers to expect a cataclysmic disruption of society, an immediate and absolute division between the 'sons of light' and the 'sons of darkness'...It was to this impatience that the parable was primarily directed." (France)

**The field is the world:** Significantly, this parable illustrates not necessarily that there will be false believers among true believers in the church (though that is also true to some extent); otherwise Jesus would have explained that the **field is the church**. Yet He carefully said that **the field is the world**.

“Of greater importance in the history of the church has been the view that this actually means that the field is the church. The view was largely assumed by the early church fathers, and the tendency to interpret the parable that way was reinforced by the Constantinian settlement. Augustine made the interpretation official struggling against the Donatists...Most Reformers followed the same line.” (Carson)

The point is clear, both in the world and in the kingdom community. Ultimately it is not the job of the church to weed out those who appear to be Christians but actually are not; that is God’s job at the end of this age.

As long as God’s people are still in this **world** (the **field**), there will be unbelievers among them; but it should not be because God’s people receive unbelievers as if they were believers, ignoring either the belief or conduct of professed believers.

There is additional significance in saying, “**The field is the world**” instead of “The field is Israel.” “This brief statement presupposes a mission beyond Israel.” (Carson)

**The enemy who sowed them is the devil:** Clearly, the enemy plants counterfeits in the world and in the kingdom community, and this is why merely being a member of the Christian community isn’t enough.

**The reapers are angels... The Son of Man will send out His angels:** We often don’t consider that the **angels** of God have a special role in the judgment of the world. Yet they do, and are worthy of respect because of that role.

“This casts special scorn upon the great evil angel. He sows the tares, and tries to destroy the harvest; and, therefore, the good angels are brought in to celebrate his defeat, and to rejoice together with their Lord in the success of the divine husbandry.” (Spurgeon)

**Will cast them into the furnace of fire:** Jesus used this parable to clearly illustrate the truth that there are two different paths and eternal destinies. A **furnace of fire** represents one destiny and radiant glory (**shine forth as the sun**) the other destiny.

“The fate of these ungodly ones will be *fire*, the most terrible of punishments; but this will not annihilate them; for they shall exhibit the surest tokens of a living woe – ‘*wailing and gnashing of teeth.*’” (Spurgeon)

The wheat comes into God’s barn from all over the world, from all ranks of society, from all ages of God’s church. The one thing they have in common is that they were sown of the Lord, and from the good seed of His Word.

**Shine forth as the sun:** (Daniel 12:3). Believers already shine in that they possess the Spirit of Christ and the glorious message of the gospel (5:16; 2 Cor. 4:3-7). We will shine even more in the glory of Christ’s kingdom and eternal heaven (Rom. 8:16-23; Phil. 3:20-21; Rev. 9:7-9).

It is beyond description what is waiting for the true believer, who stays faithful to the end. It will be one eternal day with the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We will shine because we will be in the presence of the Light (Jesus). Here, Jesus just said one more time; don't turn away from God.

## Lesson Summary

In Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 — the Parable is a classic farming parable encompassing the entire seasonal growing cycle. From preparation of the farm ground to the harvesting of the grain. Jesus explained the parable to his disciples giving us the true meaning of the wheat and tares. Again, the symbolism of the parable is:

- The farmer (sower) = Jesus, the Son of man
- The field = the world
- The good seed = true children of the Kingdom
- The tares (weeds) = children of Satan
- The enemy = Satan, *i.e.* the devil
- The harvest = end of the Church age
- The harvesters (reapers) = God's good angels

During the Church age, *i.e.* the time from Pentecost until his second coming, Jesus saves sinners. He plants the good seed of wheat in the world. The good seed represents his true disciples.

Satan, of course, has his bad seed of tares sown throughout the world, and even inside Christ's church. Those tares found inside the Church are Christian hypocrites, such as Judas Iscariot.

Christ's workers asked if they should uproot the weeds and the farmer told them to wait. Uprooting the tares would hurt the wheat that was already growing. He told them to wait, allowing the reapers to sort the wheat and tares during the harvest.

Jesus made it clear that final vengeance is his, because he will inflict his wrath on those tares who were not transformed while inside his church. His angels will sort out the weeds, *i.e.* the hypocrites within his Church and all unbelievers. They will be brought before Jesus' great white throne for condemnation. **The Christian hypocrites will receive the worst punishment.** Christ will sentence all nonbelievers to hell.

**The Kingdom of God, after this final purging of weeds, will become pure in the end.** This is the ultimate focus of the wheat and tares parable. "The righteous (aka the wheat) will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom" (**Matthew 13:43**).

## Lessons from the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares:

1. The kingdom of heaven exists on earth side by side with the realm of the evil one.
2. Both good and bad seeds mature in the world, and we should not be surprised by the existence of false believers and teachers.
3. We should focus on bearing fruit and spreading the gospel, rather than judging and uprooting the false believers.
4. We should not take it upon ourselves to uproot unbelievers because the difference between true and false believers isn't always obvious.
5. We should examine our own relationship with Christ and make sure we are bearing good fruit.
6. We should trust in God's sovereignty and judgment and have faith that He will separate the true believers from the false believers at the end of the age.

## Additional things to note from this lesson:

- **Believers can anticipate Godly growth in field of men.** The context for Jesus' teaching is the preparation of sending His disciples into the harvest fields. They will see some come to Christ and be faithful, growing like healthy fields of wheat. They will, also, see some sickly specimens. If they stayed long enough, however, the sun and the soil will correct these struggling saints and grow them into strong disciples. Yet, they will begin to make judgments about the Kingdom: *who's in who's out. And that critical moment they will cease being disciples of Christ that advance the Kingdom and become destructive forces that hinder the Kingdom.*

The Biblical truth is that it is Jesus who sows the seed of the Kingdom and it is His glorious work that causes the growth. Indeed, faith matures in a person's life under the supernatural agency of God working through the person's exercise of the means of grace: Word, Sacrament, and Prayer. For any of us to judge a person who is still on the way, it is to not merely cut short the sanctifying activity of the Lord, it is to assume to ourselves that authority which is quite obviously forbidden and quite naturally impossible.

When a person comes to Christ, when a believer is growing in Christ, we must always remember that there is a great anticipation: God is never finished with us. He is always working in our lives. Never judge the final legacy of a believer by his faith and works today. Tomorrow may bring extraordinary growth that defies your assumptions.

- **Believers can anticipate devilish deeds in the Kingdom of Christ.** The story progresses with an enemy coming in to sow tares in the same field as the week. Jesus tells us that this enemy in the parable is the devil. And the seed that he sows is zizania, or, "darnel" as it is called even today in Israel. This is, indeed, a "weed" as the ESV puts it. Yet, the older King James English of "tares" is a much more picturesque word to describe this plant. It is much more than a weed. It is, in fact, a weed that looks like wheat and, in its early stages of development, is identical to wheat. Yet, at maturity, it produces a black fruit that is inedible and useless. The power of the parable is centered in both the activity of the enemy, while the farm hands sleep, and the counterfeit seeds. Moreover, Jesus

emphasizes that despite the presence of these tares, the whole field must be allowed to grow together until the End of Days, when God's angels will discriminate between the faithful and the phony. Thus, there are several critical cautions for Christians in this parable:

- Be aware of the enemy. We are aware of the presence of evil in this world.
  - We are not defeated merely by knowing that there are imposters among us. Some will be converted. Others will be judged. Yet, the old Puritan concern for always bringing our own lives before the Lord to "search me, God, and know my heart" is an appropriate response for each of us in this parable.
- **Believers must resist malicious meddling with divine prerogatives.** Jesus explains the parable as the simultaneous growth of wheat and tares. He addressed that impulsive part of human nature that would say, "Alright then, let's go pull weeds!" No. Jesus says that we are to let them alone. The truth is, the discrimination between the spiritual destiny of people is the divine right of the Lord. We have no right to go beyond those directions we have been given to protect the Church through proper Biblical discipline.

There are those who fall, those who need help, those who reject Christ in our midst. Jesus gives clear instruction on the protecting the honor of His Name and the reputation of the Church. But, here, we must collate other guidance with undeniable restrictions. Judging who is in and who is out is not our work. It is God's business. Period.