

“Wheat and Weeds”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Baxter T. Exum (#1045)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
December 6, 2009



Introduction:

Over the past few weeks, we have been looking together at several parables—short stories or word pictures. **»PPT»** We started about a month ago by looking at a warning from the Lord in Matthew 7, as He warned us about the danger of wolves in sheep's clothing. He warned that false prophets would come in disguised with righteousness, but inwardly, they are ravenous wolves who do not really care about the flock.

»PPT» We then looked at the parable of the Ten Minas from Luke 19, and we discovered that ten slaves were each given the equivalent of about \$10,000 as the nobleman left to receive his kingdom. The citizens rejected his rule altogether, but even among his slaves, some invested the money wisely, but at least one slave kept it all nice and shiny and did nothing. Those responses illustrate what we do with the gospel today. Are we working with it as we should, or are we hiding it away somewhere.

»PPT» Two weeks ago, we looked at a parable on prayer—the story of a man who had a friend show up at midnight, passing through on a long journey. The man goes next door and asks his neighbor for bread. Reluctantly, but under social pressure, the neighbor gives in and provides bread for his friend. The lesson was not that God is a neighbor who needs to be pestered into answering our prayers, but the lesson was that God is so much more than that. And if our selfish, imperfect neighbor will get up in the middle of the night to help us out, then so much more would that be true of God, our perfect Father in heaven. And the lesson was that we are to pray with confidence, knowing that God is eager to answer our prayers.

»PPT» And then, not even knowing that we were in the middle of this series, I found it interesting that my dad presented two lessons last week—one in Bible class and one during the worship service—and both lessons were based on parables! In class, we studied the parable of the soils from Matthew 13. And when it comes to the work that he is doing with French Bible Missions, we discovered that the seed is landing in some very unusual places. Sometimes, there is terrific interest at first, but challenges come, and the students are never heard from again. Sometimes, the seed is planted, but it takes a long time for them to consider and weigh the cost of accepting the gospel message. We certainly pray for those who live in Islamic nations who are studying the courses over the Internet. But then sometimes, praise God, the seed sprouts and grows in the good soil, and students obey the Lord by

turning away from sin, and by allowing themselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

Then, in the worship hour last week, we looked at the parable of the seed in **Mark 4**. When it comes to seed, there are many things we do not understand—even the farmer does not completely understand the process, but he faithfully plants, he waits patiently, and it is God who ultimately causes the growth.

This morning, I would like for us to continue thinking in terms of **seeds** and **planting** as we consider another parable—and, like the parable of the soils, this one is also found in **Matthew 13**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found starting on **page 1523**. But in contrast to the parable of the soils, the emphasis in this parable is on the presence of **weeds**. **»PPT»**

As I started doing the research for this morning's lesson, I went to the dictionary and discovered that a weed is defined as, **"A valueless plant considered undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome, especially one growing profusely where it is not wanted; especially one that grows on cultivated ground to the exclusion or injury of the desired crop."** Basically, then, a weed is any plant that grows where it is not wanted. We think about clover, for example. Some people will resort to all kinds of chemicals when they find clover in their beautiful lawns, and yet when it comes to St. Patrick's Day, clover is practically worshiped—so it all depends on whether we want it or not.

It seems like we had a hard time with weeds at our house this year. Last year, we made the mistake of feeding the birds with that thistle seed. Not good! Not good at all! The birds took that seed and spread it everywhere. We had thistles all over the place, and as you know, thistles are rather difficult to pull. And really, we know that pulling any kind of weeds can be some very tedious work—we're dealing with the heat, we are all stooped over, there are bugs out there, the work is monotonous, and *sometimes we make mistakes*. **»PPT»** A year or so ago, I sent my mom a cartoon that reminded me of mom and dad. The husband comes in and says, **"Is this a weed?"** And the wife replies, **"No. And I will tell you, that expensive plant you just pulled up will not die alone."** And so it is hard sometimes to tell the difference between the weeds and the valuable plants. In the parable for this morning, though, we discover that *the weeds were not there by accident*. In fact, the Lord is about to tell us a story about some weeds that were actually planted by an enemy, and the story helps us understand why the Lord allows evil in this world—a simple story from everyday life, a story of something that all of us have done—planting and weeding, and yet it has a deep spiritual message. **»PPT»** If you will, please look with me at the parable itself—**Matthew 13:24-30**...

²⁴ Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir,

did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' ²⁹ "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'''

That's the parable. Jesus goes on to make some other comments, Matthew has some comments (comments that were included in our Scripture reading for this morning) but then we pick up with verses 36-43. If you will, please look with me at the explanation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds—Matthew 13:36-43...

³⁶ Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." ³⁷ And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴² and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

As we think back over these verses, I would like for us to move through the story in chronological order as we sift out the spiritual lessons from the physical story.

- I. **And the first thing we notice in the parable is that VARIOUS SEEDS WERE PLANTED IN THE FIELD—in other words, there was a SOWING that took place. »PPT»**

And we need to clarify right away that the seeds were being sown in the world. In verse 38, Jesus said, *"The field is the world."* And so in the field (in the world), we find, first of all, that the Son of Man (or Jesus) has planted the good seed, He has placed the *"sons of the kingdom"* in the world. We are talking here about those who have responded to the word of God. As Christians, as sons of the kingdom, we have been placed in the world for a reason.

However, in this parable we also have a villain, we have an enemy. The enemy has come in under the cover of darkness, the enemy has planted weeds among the wheat, and we discover (in verse 39) that the enemy is identified as the *"devil."*

We are talking here, then, about Satan. This whole world is like a field, God has placed good people here, but Satan has come in and has planted seeds of rebellion—men and women who oppose the truth, adversaries who try to make life miserable for those who are good—in a word: WEEDS.

»PPT» Jesus uses a word that most likely refers to a weed known to as “DARNEL,” or “false wheat.” From what I understand, darnel looks almost exactly like wheat as it sprouts and grows. It receives the same sunshine, the same water, the same wind, the same humidity, but it never produces any fruit. The tiny seeds are basically good for nothing. And so we find that an enemy had very quietly snuck in and planted these seeds right there along with the wheat. What a dirty trick! Satan loves trying to make evil look good and good look evil. Satan loves trying to keep us just a little bit confused. He loves doing things in secret. He loves messing up God’s plan. By planting the weeds in with the wheat, he was able to diminish the wheat harvest. He was able to make the harvest a much more difficult process. And for those in the middle of it, it hardly seems fair! The sons of the kingdom had done nothing wrong. They had done nothing to deserve this. And yet that is how Satan operates. He is our adversary.

We think back to the Garden of Eden. God had planted a perfect garden—literally and in every way. Two people were placed in that garden and were given complete freedom of choice. They were given one rule—one thing they were not to do. God said they could eat anything, but they were not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But into that beautiful, perfect setting, Satan went to work. And instead of choosing to follow God’s law, Satan planted seeds of doubt and of jealousy, and the Bible tells us that Eve was deceived, and she ate. Adam followed her lead, not the way it should work in a marriage, and the Bible says that at that point death entered the world—spiritual death, as Adam and Eve were separated from God. That seed of rebellion was planted by an enemy, God’s enemy, our enemy.

Satan is actively opposing the sons of the kingdom. Satan is out there sowing weeds. Satan is not content with letting Christians grow in peace and quiet—he can’t have that, and so he steps in and starts planting weeds. I have read that planting darnel could actually be punished under Roman law. And so there was a law against it. It was something that people actually did—and it was bad—it was an act of revenge.

»PPT»

As we think about the sowing, then, we find at least a couple of lessons. First of all, it should be of some comfort to those of us as Christians to know that God has planted us in the world for a reason. In the parable, the farmer had a reason for putting the good seed in the field. We remember what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:10**, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*” But secondly, we also learn that Satan is actively working against us. As sons of the kingdom, we are the target. Satan’s plan is to keep us from fulfilling our purpose. There is a battle going on, and that is probably one of the most important lessons we can learn from the sowing that’s going on.

II. As we look back into the parable, there is a progression as we find that **there is a time of GROWING—THERE IS A TIME WHEN THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS ARE ALLOWED TO GROW UP SIDE BY SIDE.** **»PPT»**

The slaves noticed the weeds, the landowner came to the conclusion that an enemy had done it, and so the slaves ask the landowner if he would like them to go and pull up the weeds. And at this point, the landowner gives an interesting answer. He says, ***“No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.”*** His main concern, then, was that none of the wheat be damaged or lost. As we look at the world around us, we see a lot of evil, a lot of confusion, and like the slaves, we may challenge God—we may ask God, ***“How can you let this bad stuff happen?”*** And yet ultimately God lets it happen for the benefit of the wheat!

As I see it, if God were to bring judgment before the appropriate time, it is possible that some people would end up being lost who should have been saved. Or, to put it in another way: God is patient. As Peter said in **2 Peter 3:7-9**, ***“But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”*** And so it is not as if God cannot see what’s going on down here, but it is a case of God being patient. God is waiting. We are living in a time of grace—a time of testing, a time of growth.

And unlike actual wheat and weeds, people have a way of changing over time. Those who are ***“sons of the evil one”*** are not locked in—they don’t need to stay that way. As I see it, at least, God is being patient in hopes that the weeds will change. We remember Paul’s words to the young preacher Timothy, in **2 Timothy 2:23-26**, ***“But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”***

And here’s something else to think about: The weeds are not the enemy. I’m not sure how much to make out of that distinction, but the weeds are those who have been ***planted*** by the enemy. The enemy is the devil. How are the weeds going to change? Well, as Paul said, his prayer was that ***“...God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.”*** The knowledge of the truth comes through teaching. As children of the king, our role during this time of growing is to teach. Our role is to speak up. Our role as children of the king is to warn the weeds that the Day of Judgment is coming closer hour by hour, because as it is, we are living in a time of testing, a time of growth in one direction or another. Bad guys don’t always stay bad guys, and good guys don’t always stay good guys.

Perhaps you can think of a time in your life when you could have very easily been uprooted—a time when God would have been completely justified in bringing our existence to an end. And yet by the grace of God, a change has taken place. It seems, then, that the point is that we can look at the world around us in the same way. I'm sure we all know some people who would qualify right now as being weeds, but thank God, the final judgment has been delayed. We don't know how long, but for now, there is the possibility for change. We think of Jesus—Jesus had a way of assuming the best of people. We think of the woman caught in the very act of adultery in John 8. As we learned in our Wednesday class several weeks ago, Jesus was not soft on sin, but He challenged her to move on and to become something better, ***“Go. From now on sin no more.”*** The Lord, therefore, sees people not so much for who they are right now, but He sees people as what they can become. The Lord sees our potential, and He is patient. He patiently waits as the weeds and the wheat grow up together. So, there is a time of sowing, and there is also a time of growing.

III. But as we bring our study to an end, we need to remind each other that there will also be a time of MOWING—A TIME OF FINAL JUDGMENT.

»PPT»

There is a day of reckoning, because at the end of the parable, we find that the wheat and the weeds are separated. The weeds are gathered up, and tied into bundles, and they are burned in the fire. I hope we can understand the simple truth of what the Lord is saying here—for those who are weeds, the end of this age will not be a pleasant experience. Those who have harmed others will be paid in full. Those who have rejoiced with unrighteousness will be punished severely. Those who have hindered the growth of the church, those who have divided the church, will be pulled up and burned in the fire. For those who have celebrated the temporary triumph of evil, there will be no mercy. As Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7, ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”***

Of course, as we are living this life, it seems like people are getting away with stuff. It seems as if those who do evil are doing pretty well sometimes. And yet we remember how Jesus said in Matthew 5:45, that God, ***“...causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”*** And so during the time of growth and testing, it may appear that some people are doing quite well. And yet perhaps we could compare it to the man who jumped from the roof of the 50-story building without a parachute. As he passed the 30th floor, someone shouted, ***“How's it going?”*** And the jumper yelled back, ***“So far, so good!”*** You see, when we look around us and see evil people who appear to be doing well, they are like the guy who is plummeting past the 30th floor, ***“So far, so good,”*** but they are hurtling toward the end of time. They are falling headlong into the Day of Judgment.

This is not a pleasant teaching, but it is necessary for us to hear. There is a line between right and wrong, and good and evil. And that line is not drawn by network TV. That line is not drawn by congress. That line is not drawn by a jury of our peers.

That line is not drawn by any kind of vote we can take as a congregation. But that line is drawn by the landowner. And those who cross the line will be thrown into the fiery furnace on the Day of Judgment. And yes, God is a God of great mercy, but He is also a God of justice. He sent His own Son as a sacrifice to avoid this situation, but for those who ignore the sacrifice, God's wrath is just as sure as the pews we are all sitting on this morning! There is a final day, and on that day all people will be divided into one of two groups—those whose sins have been covered by the blood of Christ and those who stand condemned. And so the question is: Are we wheat, or are we weeds? Are we children of the kingdom, or are we children of the evil one?

This morning's parable, then, is really an urgent call that we would turn away from our sins and throw ourselves at God's feet in faithful, loving obedience. The Judgment is coming, but until it comes, we have the moment right now to confront sin in our own lives and to rip it out ourselves. Until that day comes, we have a chance to turn around.

Of course, for those of us as Christians, we have an amazing promise here. The wheat will be gathered into the Master's barn, and the Lord Himself says (in **verse 43**), that, ***"...the righteous will shine forth as sun in the kingdom of their Father."*** As Christians, we are not to be discouraged when we see all of the evil in the world, but we live with the eager anticipation that our eternal destiny is an eternal home with the Master.

Conclusion:

This morning, as we think about what the Lord has said, we have a reminder that life among the weeds is not easy, and the challenge is that we are to be that one stalk of wheat that produces a crop, even if no one else appreciates it.

If you are not yet a child of the kingdom, the Bible teaches that we need to give up sin, that we need to publicly admit that Jesus is the Son of God, and that we need to imitate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our own lives by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the forgiveness of our past sins. It is at that point that our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, and it is at that point that we are buried with Christ in baptism. If you would like to study it further, we would be glad to meet with you today.

On the other hand, maybe you are already a Christian and you have fallen into sin—perhaps you look a lot more like a weed than wheat right now. Until the Lord returns, or until you die (whichever comes first), you have the opportunity to make things right with God. We would be glad to pray with you as a congregation. If you are facing some special struggle, we would be glad to pray about that as well. We would encourage and invite you to write it down and bring it to the front. If you are ready to obey the gospel, or if we can encourage you in your Christian walk right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org