

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #12 — Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 — Weeds Among Good Plants

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 root up 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.’ ”

[In verses 31-35, Jesus tells two short parables about the kingdom of heaven.]

The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds Explained

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 sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons 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 fiery 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. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Parable #12 ~ Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 ~ Wheat & Weeds ~ Questions

Note: this is the first in a series of eight “Kingdom of Heaven” parables and the only one explained by Jesus. After telling this, he expects you to “get it.”

1. Why do people dislike weeds?
2. In this parable, who is the sower? What does the field represent? The wheat? The weeds? The enemy? The harvest? The harvesters?
3. What did the servants volunteer to do for the owner of the field? (Vs 13:28)
4. On what grounds did the owner turn down the servants’ suggestion? (Vs 13:29) How difficult is it to pull up only the weeds from a densely growing bed of flowers, Pachysandra, or even just grass? Can you always clearly identify the weeds from the good plants?
5. What dangers lie in trying to label people as either “weeds” or wheat?”
6. Whose responsibility is it to identify the weeds and deal with them?
7. What does this parable teach about church purity? Divine patience? Human accountability?
8. If you had to guess, what would you say would be the ratio of “wheat” to “weeds” in Morristown (or your home town)?
9. How do these kinds of passages (threats of judgement and harsh punishment for unbelievers) make you feel?
10. In what ways can you “shine like the sun” in your contacts with unbelievers? What does this mean? (Daniel 12:3) What does this say about Christians who try to isolate themselves from non-Christians?
11. It is possible to interpret this parable to mean that whatever you were at birth (weed or wheat) is what you remain to the “end of the age.” What do you think about that?
12. What does this parable teach us about the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God)?

Parable #12 ~ Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 ~ Leader's Guide

This commentary, which answers most of the 12 discussion questions, is based on material at www.GotQuestions.org.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds, or tares, follows the parable of the sower and four types of soils found in all three synoptic gospels, but this one is only in Matthew. It seems to enlarge upon the seeds in the previous parable that fell among the thorns and brambles which grew up and choked the plants. But this is different. In the previous parable, Jesus said the thorns represented the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. In this parable, worldly worries and deceitfulness may be some of the characteristics of the weeds, but primarily the weeds or tares represent unbelievers and what Jesus calls “sons of the devil.”

As you delve into the parable, you find it filled with spiritual significance and truth. But, in spite of the clear explanation of the parable that Jesus gave (Matthew 13:36-43), this parable is very often misinterpreted. Many commentaries and sermons have attempted to use this story as an illustration of the condition of the church, noting that there are both true believers (the wheat) and false professors (the weeds) in both the church at large and individual local churches. While this may be true, Jesus distinctly explains that the field is not the church; it is the world (v. 38).

This misinterpretation is not new; it's been misunderstood for centuries. Way back in the third and fourth centuries, the Donatists like the Novatianists a century earlier held that the church must be a church of “saints,” not “sinners,” and they should be excluded. Augustine of Hippo in the late 300s used this parable to argue against them saying that Jesus quite plainly identifies the field where the seed is planted as the world, not the church.

Another important point: when Jesus speaks of “the kingdom of heaven,” he is speaking of it in the world today, not as a distant destination where we go after the final judgement. This can be a somewhat puzzling concept. We have Bible verses that say the kingdom of heaven is already with us, but others say it is coming at the end of the age. Here's an example of each:

- Luke 17:21 – Nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”
- Matthew 7:21 – Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

In Luke, the Pharisees had asked when God's kingdom would come not realizing it had already arrived. The kingdom of God (or of heaven) is not like an earthly kingdom with geographical boundaries. Instead, it begins with the work of God's spirit in people's lives and in relationships. So the kingdom of God is a spiritual realm where God rules and where we share in his eternal life. We join the kingdom when we trust in Christ as our savior—that's why it is here now and will continue into the eternal future.

Back to the original parable. In the agricultural society of Christ's time, many farmers depended on the quality of their crops. An enemy sowing weeds would have sabotaged a business. The tares in the parable were likely darnel (*Lolium temulentum*, also known as poison darnel, darnel ryegrass or cockle) because that weed, until fully mature, looks the same as wheat. Without modern weed killers, what would a wise farmer do in such a dilemma? Instead of tearing out the wheat with the tares, the landowner in this parable wisely waited until the harvest. After harvesting the whole field, the tares—or darnel—could be separated and burned. The wheat would be sold or saved in the barn.

In the explanation of parable, Christ declares that He Himself is the sower. He spreads His redeemed seed, true believers, in the field of the world. Through His grace, these Christians bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23 lists love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). Their presence on earth is the reason the "kingdom of heaven" is like the field of the world. When Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 3:2), he meant the spiritual realm which exists on earth side by side with the realm of the evil one (1 John 5:19). When the kingdom of heaven comes to its final fruition, heaven will be a reality and there will be no "weeds" among the "wheat." But for now, both good and bad seeds mature in the world.

The enemy in the parable is Satan. In opposition to Jesus Christ, the devil tries to destroy Christ's work by placing false believers and teachers in the world who lead many people astray. Look at some of those televangelist scandals (Jim Bakker, Bob Larson, Terry Smith, Vaughn Reeves and many more) and you can see that the world is filled with professing "Christians" whose ungodly actions bring reproach on the name of Christ. But we are not to pursue such people in an effort to destroy them. For one thing, we don't know if immature and innocent believers might be injured by our efforts. Further, one has only to look at the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, and the reign of Queen "Bloody Mary" in England to see the results of men taking upon themselves the responsibility of separating true believers from false. This is a task reserved for God alone. Instead of requiring these false believers to be rooted out of the world, and possibly hurting immature believers in the process, Christ allows them to remain until His return. At that time, angels will separate the true from false believers.

In addition, we are not to take it upon ourselves to uproot unbelievers because the difference between true and false believers isn't always obvious. Tares, especially in the early stages of growth, resemble wheat. Likewise, a false believer may resemble a true believer. In Matthew 7:22, Jesus warned that many profess faith but do not know Him. Thus, each person should examine his own relationship with Christ.

Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 13:5) – Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.

Another good test of your faith is in 1 John 2:3-6 – ³ And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. ⁴ If someone claims, “I know God,” but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. ⁵ But those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. ⁶ Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

Jesus Christ will one day establish true righteousness. After He raptures the true believers out of this world, God will pour out His righteous wrath on the world. During that tribulation, he will draw others to saving faith in Jesus Christ. At the end of the tribulation, all unbelievers will be judged for their sin and unbelief; then, they will be removed from God’s presence. True followers of Christ will reign with Him. What a glorious hope for the “wheat”!

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