

Stories of the Kingdom – The Wheat and the Weeds – Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

WCP

Intro

Knowing how to cook for yourself; how to make a purchase at a store; knowing how to read a map; basic personal hygiene. These - along with a number of other things - are what we usually refer to as basic life skills/stuff that pretty much everyone should know in order to be considered an adult. But another basic life skill that you might not immediately think of adding to the list - but which is undeniably essential to survival in life - is properly defining terms. This is essential b/c – for instance – how *you* define “clean up your room” and how your child defines that, are not always the same thing, right? Neither is a husband’s definition of “clean the house” often the same as a wife’s definition. Which can lead to these really confused responses; where people are asking, “Wait. What?! If you’re your room is ‘clean’, how come how come none of these clothes are hung up/garbage can is overflowing?” “If you ‘cleaned’ the house then how come none of the sinks have been scrubbed and all your books/papers are still exactly where they were before but just stacked in neat piles?” Which, of course, triggers the, “What? You wanted all that done *too*?” response. In fact now, when my wife asks me to help her clean the house, she’ll make a list/clearly define what *she* means by, “cleaning the house.” Which - by now - could pretty much be summed up by saying, “Just clean it like my parents are coming over.”

We’re continuing in our summer teaching series this morning through the parables of Jesus entitled **Stories of the Kingdom**; looking at some of the more well-known stories that Jesus told in order to teach us what the Kingdom of God is like; teaching us about what is valued/despised there.

Which - given the problem we’ve just been discussing about defining our terms - is incredibly helpful for us today just as it was I Jesus’ day. For, what we’ve seen already a few times now if you’ve been with us each Sunday, is that the Jews in Jesus’ day had all kinds of different definitions of their own about what the Kingdom of God was like/what it would look like when it came. And so as Jesus – the King of the Kingdom – comes to us, a big part of His ministry is to say, “Yeah, I know that this is what *you* believe the Kingdom of God looks like, but – actually – the Kingdom of God is like this; and then He’ll go on to tell a story to illustrate the re-definition He wants to teach us.

And in the parable we’re looking at today – often called **the parable of the weeds/wheat and the weeds** Jesus is going to re-define the Kingdom of God again, now, using this story of what sounds like Guerrilla farming tactics. And, while there’s always something valuable for us to grasp whenever Jesus describes for us what His Kingdom is like, I think today’s definition in particular is going to be really helpful for us; primarily b/c it addresses a question that comes up all the time about Jesus’ Kingdom that people in Jesus’ day had as well, viz. If the Kingdom of God is so good/like this great banquet that we don’t want to miss being invited to, and Jesus – the King of God’s Kingdom – has come to set up that Kingdom, why is

there still so much evil/suffering in the world; why does the Kingdom of God Jesus said He came to bring still look so much like the way things were before He came?

And in order to see how Jesus unpacks the answer to that question, I want to look at our passage this morning in just two ways. I want to show you **The Kingdom of God that *is*** and then finally **The Kingdom of God that *will be* (x2)**.

So, if you've closed your bibles, open them again to Matt. 13:24 and follow along with me as we look at Jesus' next story of the Kingdom.

Ok, so let's look first of all at:

1. The Kingdom of God that *is*

So, if you look with me at **vs. 24**, here is where the King of the Kingdom begins His next definition of what His Kingdom is like; and He says it's like a man sowing good seed in his field. Now, this is significant b/c – if you look at the context – this parable that Jesus tells is immediately following the parable of the sower, and then it's followed immediately by the parable of the mustard seed; two of the parables that we've already looked at in this series. But, although all three parables have to do with sowing seeds, each one actually illustrates a different aspect of what the Kingdom is like. In the **parable of the sower**, we're shown how the different types of soil in someone's heart affect how the gospel seed is received; in the **parable of the mustard seed** we're shown what incredible things God can grow out of the smallest of seeds in His Kingdom. In today's parable of **the wheat and the weeds** (also talking about sowing) what Jesus is illustrating now is how - in the Kingdom as it presently is - there are actually two different types of sowers *as well as* two different types of seed.

Let's look again at how Jesus describes this in **vss. 24-25** Jesus says (**READ vss. 24-25**). So, there's a farmer who Jesus says sowed **good seed** in his field and then - presumably that very same night while everybody else is sleeping – an enemy comes and sows these weeds among the wheat. Now, we don't know whether eco-terrorism was a big thing in Jesus' day or not; scholars tell us there *was* a law in Rome forbidding such a practice as this, but regardless, the point here is that the seed that was planted originally *was* good, and these weeds were something that was introduced by someone else; an enemy of this farmer.

And, of course, the sabotage from this enemy is successful b/c he sows these seeds while everyone is sleeping and – honestly – who even *would* go out and check their seeds after they'd been planted to see if they're still the same ones? But, the other less obvious reason that the sabotage is successful is b/c of the *kind* of weeds this enemy planted among the wheat; the word in Greek (*zizania*) is almost certainly referring to the **bearded darnel** which, apparently, is very closely related to wheat and is also almost indistinguishable from wheat when the plants are young. Which makes much more sense, then, when we get to **vs. 26** and read (**READ vs. 26**). It's only once the wheat is almost fully grown and begins to form heads that the servants working in the farmer's field come to realize that weeds have also been sown among the wheat.

But look now at the question this discovery leads the servants to ask the farmer in **vs. 27** they say (**READ vs. 27**). Now, honestly, I'm not trying to create any conflict for anyone on the way home, and I'm sure there are probably exceptions to this, but – on the whole – I think it's true in most cases to say that if you gotta ask the question at all, at some level in your mind, you have a reasonable doubt of that person you're questioning. How do I know that? B/c if I come home from work one day and our car is hovering 8 feet off the ground over the front lawn, I don't go to my daughters and ask, "Hey girls ... is one of you levitating the family car right now?" And I *don't* ask them that b/c I have no doubt whatsoever that they're the ones responsible for the hovering car out front.

So, what I'm saying is that the fact that these servants would even ask this question of the farmer at all *means* there's a question in their minds as to whether or not he might be responsible for the weeds.

And this is actually the reason that I'm starting out talking about the Kingdom as it *is* and not – say – the Kingdom as it *was* originally; b/c this is *absolutely* the world we live in: where weeds grow up right alongside the wheat/where evil grows up right alongside the good; and that was no less true in Jesus' day than it is today. And – very often – when it comes to people's definition of **goodness** (even today) they'll ask questions like, "If God is so good then why would He create a world where all this evil, sickness, and death even exist?" And – just like the servants in Jesus' parable – I'm saying that the reason they're even asking the question at all is b/c there's at least some reasonable doubt in their minds that God might be responsible for all that stuff.

And so, again – **vs. 27** - b/c their definition of a good crop seems to be different than the farmer's they ask, "*Didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?*" Which, honestly, is a question I don't really get. B/c what are they expecting the farmer to say anyways? "Dang it! What was I thinking? I knew I shouldn't have used the bag of seed that had the 'may contain traces of weeds' on it, and just gone for the bag of seed that said 'Wheat only.'"

Which means that, actually, in questioning the goodness of the crop they see, what the servants are actually questioning is the goodness (or at least the wisdom) of the farmer himself.



Graciously - albeit matter of factly – we see the farmer’s response to their accusation in **vs. 28a** where he says, **(READ vs. 28a)** An “enemy” Jesus says; someone who is opposed to the farmer and who is set on destroying the good crop that he had planted.

But notice now in **vs. 28b**, the minute their question about the origin of the weeds is answered, once again operating according to their definition of what they think a good crop should look like, they go immediately into protective mode; once again,. And so they say, “Ok. Well, if you didn’t plant those weeds then, obviously, what you want us to do is yank those weeds out/get them as far away from your wheat as possible.”

But look at the farmer’s response in **vs. 29-30** He says **(READ vs. 29-30)**. Which *probably* sounded like evil/foolishness to the servants again; “What?! Just let those weeds grow up alongside your wheat? That doesn’t make any sense!” And yet, when you look more closely at the farmer’s response, you see that he’s saying this – not out of concern for the weeds – but out of a deep love/concern for his wheat.

We see that first of all in the first half of **vs. 29** where he’s saying, basically, let them continue to grow together b/c the roots of the wheat and the weeds will be so intertwined by now, by pulling up the weeds you may pull up the wheat along with it.

And it’s not stated explicitly here, but – in knowing the nature of this bearded darnel weed that was planted alongside the good seed; that you can’t fully know whether the plant is wheat or weed until it’s fully grown and ready to harvest – the second reason the farmer wants to let them grow together is b/c he’s *also* concerned that the servants may inadvertently destroy a plant that appears to be a weed, but that is actually wheat.

Now - just like with the parable of the sower - we’re blessed once again here with an interpretation of this parable, directly from Jesus Himself; and we see that in the second part of our passage in **vss. 36-43**. And if you look at **vss. 37-39** in particular, Jesus gives us something of a lexicon/glossary where He many of the elements in His story are referring to – look with me there. Jesus says, **(READ vs. 37-39)**.

App

Which reveals a lot for us, actually, as we’re trying to understand/apply this parable to our lives today, just as I have no doubt it did for Jesus’ disciples then as well.

But what I want to focus your attention on in particular this morning is Jesus’ revelation that He is the Farmer who has sowed the good seed/the sons/daughters of the Kingdom in this world and seeking a bountiful harvest. B/c what that clearly shows us is that the plans/intentions of God towards His creation have always been good; and whenever we question the goodness of His creation by asking a question like, “If God is so good why would He create a world where evil, sickness, death even exist?” we’re not only questioning the goodness/wisdom of God’s creation, we’re questioning the goodness/wisdom of God Himself. What Jesus’ story illustrates is that the world we’re living in *isn’t* the world He created anymore; Gen. 1-3 clearly reveals an enemy has done this.



And maybe you hear that and you say, “Fine. Maybe God’s not the cause of all this evil in the world, but if He was really good/wise He would do something about it/remove it from His good creation.” But that’s ignoring what this parable also shows us in that God permits the presence of evil in His good creation right now – not out of concern for the weeds – but out of a deep love/concern for the wheat.

And just think about that: although – like the servants, we might want Jesus to rid the world of the weeds growing up all around us too, how many of us who came to faith later in life aren’t grateful we weren’t pulled up before when we looked so much like weeds; or how many of us don’t *still* display weed-like qualities all the time that might lead us to be mistakenly pulled up if our definition of a “good creation” was carried out? In **2 Peter 3:9** Peter says “*The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as some count slowness, He is being patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish.*”

And what Jesus is showing us here first of all is that what is valued in His Kingdom is a patient trust in the goodness/wisdom of God even when what we see around us doesn’t match our definition of what we think goodness/wisdom should look like. For His plan from the beginning has always been good, and one day – at the end of all things when it’s time for the harvest – His promise is that He will remove all the work of the enemy for all time and restore His creation back to its original, good design.

And that's what we'll look at lastly:

2. The Kingdom of God that will be

And where Jesus makes reference to this hopeful promise is first of all in **vs. 30** – look with me there. Here Jesus speaks of this time of “harvest” in His story where – remember – the time has come when the wheat and the weeds have now grown to full maturity and have clearly revealed which one they are; and Jesus says it is this harvest time when He will fulfil His promise of restoration for His Kingdom and bring the wheat into His barn.

Now, again, we have Jesus' deeper explanation of His story in **vss. 36-43**. And in **vss. 40-43** in particular, Jesus reveals to us more of what this “harvest” time will look like. See, He says **(READ vss. 40-43)**.

Now, two things I think we need to be absolutely clear about with regards to that description:

- a) By stating that the harvest time has come, Jesus is saying – again – that both plants (wheat/weed) have come to full maturity. Which means – now - there is no longer any question/doubt as to which category they belong to. And I know there are all kinds of crazy news stories/Netflix documentaries about people being wrongfully convicted for crimes they didn't commit/etc. but what we need to know is that in God's Kingdom the true nature of every plant is already clear to Him; He's not mis-classifying anyone. And what Jesus' parable shows us is that God waits until the end of the age/end of time itself to render judgement on the weeds sown in His Kingdom, so that – along with being plain to *Him* – the identity of the wheat/weeds is also plain to everyone else.
- b) By speaking in **vs. 41** of a day when He will remove both those who do evil as well as those who cause evil to be done, Jesus is revealing that the Kingdom as it *is* right now – where wheat and weeds grow alongside one another/where seeking to live as a son/daughter of the Kingdom isn't just difficult but increasingly means more suffering/pain/loss – is not His good plan for His Kingdom, and He is coming to do something about it.

And the incredible hope that Jesus offers here *b/c* this promised harvest is coming, is this: He's telling us that a day is coming when it won't be like this anymore; that the hope of a passage like **Rev. 21** where He speaks of a day when He will wipe every tear from our eyes, and death/mourning/crying/pain will all pass away, is real and He *is* presently preparing to bring it about.

App

Which inspires hope in the sons/daughters of God's Kingdom for two reasons:

- a) Some of you have experienced some horrific injustices in your life at the hands of wicked people/and we see injustices like that happening all around the world today as well. The hope Jesus offers you here is that, in the Kingdom that *will be*, I'm going to remove every one of those causes of sin/suffering and bring about true justice at last. And I know that the idea of a God of justice/God judging people is unpopular for many in our western world today. Yet often, I wonder if that that idea isn't,



ultimately, only unpopular to people who haven't truly suffered. **Miroslav Volf** (who grew up in post WWII Yugoslavia) says in his classic treatise *Exclusion and Embrace*:

*My thesis is that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance...My thesis will be unpopular with man in the West...But imagine speaking to people (as I have) whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned, and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit...Your point to them—we should not retaliate? Why not? **I say—the only means of prohibiting violence by us is to insist that violence is only legitimate when it comes from God...**Violence thrives today, secretly nourished by the belief that God refuses to take the sword...It takes the quiet of a suburb for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence is a result of a God who refuses to judge. In a scorched land—soaked in the blood of the innocent, the idea will invariably die, like other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind...if God were NOT angry at injustice and deception and did NOT make a final end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship.*

And God's hopeful promise to us is that in the Kingdom that *will be* He's going to bring about an end/removal all those injustices we've suffered in this Kingdom that is.

- b) Some of us love this world/life that God has given us here *so much*, and so you actually struggle a bit at the thought of letting all this go in order to go to some "Kingdom of heaven." The hope of Jesus' story for you is in noticing that it's not the wheat that is removed from the world, but the weeds. And we don't have time to get into this much here at all; but the clear teaching of the bible is that **the Kingdom of heaven/Kingdom that will be is not someplace we go to at the end of the age, it's a place that God is bringing to us**; where God says He will make all things new so that – not only will all causes of sin/suffering be removed – but everything that is good/you love about this world right now, will also be 10,000x better in the Kingdom that *will be*.

In **John 14:18** Jesus tells us, "*I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.*" Which means He's telling us, "I'm not going to leave you in this seemingly endless Kingdom that *is*, where you presently struggle and suffer among the weeds; I'm coming again to make all things new."

And here - as well as in countless other passages – the confident hope Jesus' holds out again and again is that He sees/knows our sorrow, and that He's coming again to do something about it, once and for all, at the end of all things; that wrong will be made right/everything sad will come untrue/the good plan that God had for us from the beginning will – at last, one day – be our reality once again in the Kingdom that *will be*; and in a way that can never again be taken from us.

Conclusion

As we close this morning, I feel like I'd be doing all of us a massive dis-service/equivalent to pastoral malpractice, if we didn't pause to at least mention that – along with the hope offered in Jesus' story – there's also a warning. And the warning, very simply, is that while the harvest Jesus speaks of brings hope to the sons/daughters of the Kingdom, it's also undoubtedly a picture of separation and judgement for any who are not.

And the question each and every one of us needs to be able to answer for ourselves this morning is: am I a child of the Kingdom? There *is* no more important question in life than this?

And I know that can be a hard question to answer at times b/c – on the one hand – many of us still have this idea stuck in our minds that we earn our way into the Kingdom by being good enough; and so, every time we don't live up to the standard in our minds of what we think God expects, we think our standing in the Kingdom of God has been lost. If that's where you're at this morning, let me offer you the hope of **Eph. 2:8-9** which tell us very clearly, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."* Which means none of us are saved by our obedience to God, we are saved by faith/simple trust in Jesus' obedience on our behalf; and grace isn't something that can be earned; only received.

But I know the question, "Am I a child of the Kingdom?" can be hard to answer as well b/c – the way Jesus tells this story – it makes it sound like our identities are already set; like we're either a son of the Kingdom or a son of the evil one and our job is just to find out which one we are. And if that's where you're at this morning, let me offer you the hope Paul offers before the passage I just read, in **Eph. 2:1-3** where he reminds us (**READ Eph. 2:1-3**). Do you know what Paul is saying there? He's saying there is not a single child of the Kingdom who was not – at one time - a son/daughter of the evil one. You see, he says, *"All of us lived among them at one time and were, by nature, objects of God's wrath."* But then, listen to what he goes on to tell us. He writes (**READ Eph. 2:4-5**).

Do you see it now? The great hope of the gospel is that, in the coming of Jesus, God not only re-defines the Kingdom back to His original definition/intended design, He also takes men/women who are defined as weedy, sons of the evil one and *re-defines* them as wheat that He will gather into His barn; He takes rebels/those who are – by nature – objects deserving of God's wrath – and redefines them as sons/daughters of the Kingdom; and this very day – by putting your faith in Jesus and what He accomplished for you in His death and resurrection – you too can know that you are a child of the Kingdom. Elsewhere, in **Colossians 1:12-14** Paul defines that re-definition this way (**READ Col. 1:12-14**).

It's my desperate prayer for every one of us here today, that our weedy hearts may receive the good seed, deeply into an open heart; and - in so doing - be re-defined as wheat; hopefully awaiting the harvest of our King.

Let's pray.