

July 23, 2023

“Weeds Among the Wheat”
Lesson 3

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Intro

The “kingdom of heaven” is a phrase used over 30 times in Matthew’s gospel. This kingdom is a spiritual one, not a physical one with land. In this kingdom, God reigns as the sovereign, the ruler who has all power and authority.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called people to repentance to be ready for the kingdom of heaven, which was “near”. When Jesus cast out demons in Matt. 13, he said that showed that the kingdom of heaven had arrived for humanity. Jesus uses the phrase “The kingdom of heaven is like...” many times in speaking parables so his followers could understand the nature of God’s spiritual kingdom. Today’s passage is the first of the “kingdom” parables in Matthew.

Read Matthew 13:24-30

1. vs. 24: Jesus speaks of a man sowing seed in a field
 - This is the same set-up as the earlier parable of the sower and the seeds
 - This man sows “good seeds”, indicating that a good crop will result

2. vs. 25: An enemy comes to the field and sows weeds among the wheat seed
 - He comes at night so he can work in darkness, like many criminals do
 - Because it was done at night, it would have been undetectable by the workers
 - The Greek word for “weeds” refers to a plant known as darnel
 - It looks very much like wheat until it matures
 - These weeds don’t only threaten the growth of the wheat
 - They can be easily confused with the wheat crop itself
 - Darnel once eaten can cause nausea
 - Wheat is an important crop in the ancient world
 - This is shown by its image appearing on ancient coins

3. vs. 26-27: The servants come to the owner with questions about what they’re seeing
 - “Didn’t you sow good seed? Where did the weeds come from?”
 - They know their master is someone who does things right—“didn’t you...”
 - They also know, from farm work, that weeds are going to show up
 - Their concern about the weeds seems to indicate these are more than usual

4. vs. 28: The master’s response of “an enemy has done this” shows he’s not negligent in sowing
 - The servants know that weeds take water/nutrients away from the wheat
 - Surely they must be taken out as quickly as possible—right?

5. vs. 29-30a: The way these weeds and wheat grow means their roots are interconnected by now
 - To pull up the weeds would also pull up the wheat, thus hurting the crop
 - The owner chooses instead to wait until harvest to address the problem

6. vs. 30b: The owner lays out his plan at harvest time

The harvesters will pick out the weeds first, and tie them together
They will be burned eventually
Then the harvesters will gather the wheat and put it in the barn

If this is a parable about how God's kingdom works, the audience must be surprised
Likely they would expect that God's kingdom would punish evil immediately
Jesus shows this timeline isn't how God's kingdom work
God's kingdom comes even as evil is still at work
The final judgment on evil will come, but not until the end, the "harvest"
Until then, people of the kingdom will live alongside evil

Read Matthew 13:36-43

7. vs. 36: Once again, as in 13:18-23, the disciples privately ask Jesus for the deeper meaning

8. vs. 37: Jesus' explanation shows that the story is intended as an allegory

Allegories are stories where characters/situations have a 2nd meaning, a deeper one
This explanation shows that the parable isn't about farming
It's about preaching the gospel and how it is accepted
Jesus says the sower is "the Son of Man", a title used to refer to the Messiah
Jesus is identifying himself as the sower
The seed here isn't the Word of God, however—see the next verse

9. vs. 38: Jesus explains here that the field is the world, not some local plot of land

This tells that the whole world is a place to sow the seed of the gospel
The good seed here is the people in the kingdom
These people are spreaders of the gospel and harvesters of the crop
The weeds are identified as people of the evil one (Satan)
Here there is a contrast between those who follow God and those who don't

10. vs. 39: Jesus here identifies three more elements from the story

The enemy who has sowed weeds is the devil, says Jesus
The harvest is the end of time
The ones who will be doing the harvesting are God's angels
These three explanations help in understanding the next 2 verses

11. vs. 40: In vs. 30, the owner told his workers to bind the weeds first, so they could be burned

Now we understand that the weeds are people who follow Satan
This action will occur at the "harvest"—the end of time as God determines
This isn't just something that will occur at the end of a period of time
When this happens, it will be the end of time itself

12. vs. 41-42: According to Jesus here, sin and sinners will be addressed before the saved
He stated this timeline in vs. 30; here he specifies what will happen
The angels will be sent out, and they will do the weeding—the “clean-up”
The things that cause sin will be taken out
The people who do evil will be taken out
Note that Jesus doesn’t say sinners—that’s all of mankind
The ones who do evil don’t care about God or trying to please Him
Both these two elements will be thrown into fire and destroyed
Whether this is literal or figurative, sin will be eliminated forever
Jesus notes that those in this condition will be “weeping” and “gnashing” their teeth

13. vs. 43: The righteous are those who sought God and strove to follow Him
They acknowledged the sin in their lives and pled the blood of Jesus to cover it
These people “shine” in God’s kingdom
The glory of their lives and their faith shines out brightly

Jesus concludes by saying, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.”
This phrase occurs dozens of times in Psalms, in various prophets, and in the NT
Jesus is referring to spiritual ears—to a person’s heart
If one has “ears to hear”, they will believe and obey spiritual truths
Jesus says these people are wise, having built their lives on a solid foundation
(Matt. 7:24-25)

Application: This parable of the weeds among the wheat explains something many have struggled with—why God would allow the wicked to prosper alongside His people. This parable shows that God is very aware of wickedness and where it comes from; He chooses to leave it unjudged until the time allotted for judgment. God is neither oblivious to wickedness, nor approving of it by not zapping it immediately.

For we believers, we must remember that the wicked co-existing with us now are in a temporary situation—it won’t always be that way. God is as patient with them, however, as He was with us in not punishing sin as soon as it is committed. The harvest of the righteous and the wicked will come when God determines, not when people ask for it. That gives us time to pray for and talk to those who currently aren’t following God, who He would currently classify as “weeds”.

Prayer: Father God, help us to recognize and accept the world as You have designed it. We desire to be good workers in Your fields, unwilling to give up on those who seem wicked. Help us to remember that when evil seems to be winning, your final judgment will apply fairness and justice to all situations. We look forward to that day, and to being with You forever. In Jesus’ name, Amen.