

## **Being Good Wheat among the Weeds.** Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

Here is an appropriate opening for the season. Up in Heaven, God and St Francis were having a conversation

GOD: Frank, you know all about gardens and nature, what in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? Where are all my dandelions, violets, milkweed, and blackberries that I planted eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar and seed from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees, flocks of songbirds, and the fruit is delicious for animals and humans alike. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

ST. FRANCIS: Lord, it is a tribe known as "Suburbanites" who have settled there. They think of Your flowers as "weeds" and have gone to great lengths to get rid of them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it is so boring. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees or birds, only grubs and sod worms. Do these Suburbanites really want grass in their yards?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing it and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: Then My spring rains and the warm weather probably makes them happy, watching their grass grow really fast.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it ... sometimes two times a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now let me get this straight...they fertilize the grass to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, sir.

GOD: Then these Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this Lord, but when the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense! I think I like my original plan a lot better...

(<http://www.naturalhomeandgarden.org/lawnhumor.htm>)

But today, we are not talking about lawns, rather, about weeds and wheat growing in the kingdom of God.

In His "Sermon On the Mount," Jesus taught that we should not only pray for God's kingdom to come on the earth, but also seeking to live righteously in that kingdom. Then, in Matthew chapter 13, Jesus told seven parables – one after another – describing what God's Kingdom would actually look like on this Earth:

- Like various soils, there would be life situations which would either help or hinder the kingdom's growth.
- Like a small mustard seed growing into a big plant, or a pinch of yeast expanding to raise the whole loaf of bread, the kingdom's growth would be slow and hidden, but ultimately successful in the end.
- Like a treasure buried in a field, or a pearl of great price, finding God's kingdom is worth everything we have to acquire it.
- Like a fish net cast into the sea, or weeds separated from the wheat at harvest time, God knows the difference between the citizens and the enemies of His kingdom ... and a reckoning day is coming.

But for today, let's focus just on what this one parable of the weedy wheat field has to teach us about God's kingdom.

Now, for you gardeners and farmers who are still wondering at the wisdom of just letting the weeds grow and sorting things out at the end of the season, know that in this situation Jesus' agricultural advice was right on.

The weed He was talking about is known as Darnel or Bastard Wheat. While young it looks like wheat, but when mature, its seeds are poisonous to humans and animals; it must eventually be separated out. But since Darnel's roots grow deeper than the wheat around it, to pull it up before the field is ready to harvest would damage good wheat; so the farmer must patiently wait for the right time and then carefully work to sort the good from the bad.

Interestingly, like toilet papering a neighbor's yard, or spraying graffiti on their business walls, sowing weeds in another farmer's field was such a common revenge tactic in those days that it was specifically outlawed by Rome.

Let's get back to the parable of the farmer's weedy field. Since it is one of the few that Jesus then went on to carefully explain, let us look for what lessons He intended to teach us by this story. Because, in hearing His explanation, we will be brought face to face with the unpleasant truth behind

- what has really gone wrong in our world,
- who really is the source of those problems,
- what God intends to do about such evil,
- and how we must nevertheless live in this "field" like good wheat among the weeds, until God's harvest day comes.

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So, what does this wheat field parable tell us about the Kingdom Of God?

First, it makes clear that the presence of sin and evil in our world was not God's intention; all that He had planted was good; the source of the weeds was from an enemy who was intentionally seeking to do evil – Jesus named him as the devil.

Our Bible only hints about how the devil came to be: most likely, he was a fallen angel, who in attempting to lead a rebellion against God, was cast down to the earth but allowed to continue his destructive intent until he faces God's judgment at the end of the ages. Isaiah 14:12-17, Revelation 12:3-17

Why our all powerful God would allow such evil to continue wrecking His creation is one of those unexplained mysteries having to do with God's foreknowledge and providence along with human free will. But this parable at least helps us understand how to live with the circumstances.

This parable teaches that we face a very real enemy who is actively seeking to do us harm. One of the greatest achievements of the devil has been to make the world believe that he doesn't exist. He is real; a very evil spiritual being. Although he is not omnipotent, he does have some power of influence in this world - and he can walk into your garden and plant into your field.

So it is part of our Christian growth to know that while God seeks our good, there is an enemy still present with ill-will and ill-intention for both yours and all other's lives. Jesus revealed the devil's real intentions, describing him as "the thief" who has come, "*only to steal, kill and destroy.*" John 10:10

This is why we have been warned to put on the WHOLE armor of God, by developing such godly character traits as truthfulness, righteousness, and faithfulness. With a

growing knowledge of the Word of God, our assurance of salvation and His indwelling Holy Spirit, with a willingness to share the "Good news" of Jesus – this is how we stand against the schemes of the devil.

So unless you know and are prepared to face evil – in a godly manner – when it walks into your life, you will be blindsided when the enemy sows weeds in among your wheat.

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh,  
but against ... cosmic powers of this present darkness,  
against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:11-17

Second, while I have heard this parable used in many a sermon about imposters in the church, Jesus clearly identified the devil's intentions as being for the whole world.

While the church is definitely a most attractive field into which to plant weeds, it is not the only field; the devil's evil intentions are global, but ignorant, disobedient, Christians are certainly his favorite fruit.

That is why our Bible warns us ...

Be angry but do not sin; do not  
let the sun go down on your anger,  
and **do not make room for the devil.**

Ephesians 4:25-27

Third, we need to know that while we face an active enemy, his schemes do not thwart the plans of God.

The enemy's intention was to disrupt plans of the farmer. He thought that by planting weeds in his field that he would somehow discourage, distract and destroy what the master was trying to accomplish.

The natural impulse of the workers was to pull up the weeds. Likewise, when weeds sprout up in our life our first reaction is to get rid of them. That's why you probably want certain people out of your life: the haters, the naysayers, the negative ones, the gossiping ones, the miserable, the ones who mean you no good. But God says "*don't pull the weeds, leave them there for the harvesters.*" This certainly goes against what I would like to do. In my mind life would be so much better if I could just get these weeds out of my world; then my work environment would be better, my household would be better, my church would be better... but the master says "NO".

*`No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. As you try to take out the weeds, you will disrupt the plans I have for the wheat. So, do not*

*take them up, but leave them right there. For what the enemy has meant for evil I will turn into good.'*

As God told the people of Israel long ago, He also still assures us...

For surely I know the plans I have for you,  
says the Lord, plans for your welfare  
and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

So even though there are weeds in my life, I can still grow; even though the weeds are in my way, I can still produce; even though the weeds may be rubbing me the wrong way, I'm getting stronger, I'm growing taller, my roots are getting deeper. What the enemy has meant for my bad, God is turning to my good. No evil weapon formed against me shall prosper, *"for all things work out for the good for those that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose."* Romans 8:28

**Fourth and finally: Evil can only last for a season. Harvest time is soon to come and God will sort everything out.**

This, I believe, in this parable, is the main point Jesus is trying to teach us; in the end, God will sort it all out and will burn the weeds while harvesting the grain. On God's harvest day, there will only be two crops: wheat or weeds (in another parable Jesus called these sheep and goats).

Whenever you get into a conversation about faith with people who don't believe the same thing as you and you present this truth that Jesus provides the only way for our salvation, you invariably get a this kind of response: *"So you believe that everyone who doesn't believe the same thing you do goes to hell?"*

Sometimes it's an angry response, sometimes it is phrased as *"what about people who never hear, or babies, or my grandma who was a great person, ?"* ... but the basic question is the same. Our best reply should be modeled after this parable.

The servants wanted to pull weeds, but the master told them not to worry about them; in fact, he warned them that they would do more damage in the long term if they tried! So the master – God – says, *"leave it to Me to sort everyone out at the end of time."*

**Thus, our right response to that line of conversation is that, only God knows.**

I can't know for certain about anyone other than myself, because faith is a very individual, internal relationship which each of us must personally have with God – *Who really wants that not any should perish but that all should reach repentance.* 2 Peter 3:9

So, even the most adamant atheist, the most hardened criminal – like the thief on the cross – can, with their last breath call upon Jesus in faith, and be forgiven. In another of

His kingdom parables about “workers hired at the end of the day,” Jesus emphasized God’s right – in spite of our opinions – to save as many as He can, when He can. Matt. 20:1-16

You see, it is often very difficult to tell the wheat from the weeds while everything is still growing. With people, this is even more difficult because we aren’t consistent. I know for me, there have been times when I acted a lot more like a weed than like wheat! And if someone came along at those moments to chop down the weeds, I might have ended up in the burning pile instead of the barn. Only God is qualified to judge the eternal state of a soul and He does so only at harvest time.

This then is an appropriate place to stop and ask: are you sure which category you are in? The story sets this matter out pretty clearly – there will be a point where God will separate those who know Him from those who don’t. Are you confident about where you will spend eternity? In Jesus, you can be.

The main point of this parable is that God will sort everything out. After all, only God can know our heart. Only God can understand our motives and intentions with perfect clarity. Only God can forgive us our sins and accept us as His children. And, while He has made it very clear through His Word what is required of us, still, He is the only one who saves. It is God’s prerogative and the end judgment is up to Him.

**So what do we do in the meantime, trying to be good wheat while living in what we see as a weedy field?**

As I said, traditionally Biblical commentators have interpreted this parable to mean that the church will always have some “weeds” in it – we can never have a completely “pure” church. But, while the “weedy field” might especially apply to the church, it is not what Jesus said. Jesus said, “*The field is the world.*”

The field is the world and we, the “seed,” are scattered into that world, where we are to grow and bear fruit even though there might be wicked weeds all around us. At the end, in the Kingdom of God, all that is evil will be completely gone; it will be a place where *righteousness finally feels at home*. 2 Peter 3:13 Having let our light shine here, on that day, “*the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!*” Matthew 13:43

But for now, the Kingdom of God is about bearing fruit in the middle of a field that contains both good and bad, both righteous and evil. And it is about us working for God’s Kingdom in the midst of that mixed company.

So we shouldn’t be surprised when life or ministry doesn’t go smoothly. We shouldn’t be surprised when we feel surrounded by weeds. We shouldn’t be surprised when, despite our best intentions and efforts, the message of the Kingdom of God gets misinterpreted, distorted or twisted. Jesus’ parable of the weedy field, teaches us: not

to worry about the weeds, God will sort everything out. Evil can grow for awhile, but it will not prevail. Stand strong, be faithful, and we will receive our reward. We will see the harvest, we will see the Kingdom of God come in glorious purity, and we will celebrate.

Here then, is your take home for today (one of my favorite encouragements) .....

So let us not grow weary  
in doing what is right,  
for we will reap at harvest time,  
if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9