

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced heads of grain, the weeds also appeared. ²⁷The servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸He said to them, ‘An enemy did this.’ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?’ ²⁹‘No,’ he answered, ‘because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

³⁶Then Jesus sent the people away and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷He answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the Evil One. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Weeds in the Wheat

I.

And the moral of the story is... I seem to remember some children’s stories ending that way. The story would blatantly tell you what it was trying to teach in that fun, engaging way. The ant and the grasshopper taught that those who work hard when conditions are right are more likely to be able to survive during difficult times. The moral of the story of Cinderella is that it isn’t good to be envious and wicked to others; doing so often leads to negative consequences.

These days a person hears about more *immoral* morals to the stories. Children’s books proliferate with information that isn’t even age-appropriate. As for other media, those movies and TV shows designed for children often promote—or even demand—children develop certain immoral morals.

In reality, these immoral morals are simply moving down the age scale. Immorality has been increasingly blatant in entertainment for decades.

Sometimes you wonder: “Am I the only believer left?” Ok, you know you aren’t the *only* believer, but maybe one of the few.

Elijah once felt like that. Despite his triumphant victory over the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, he still was forced to flee for his life. When God asked him why he was in hiding, Elijah answered: “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant...I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life” (1 Kings 19:10, EHV). “I’m the only one,” Elijah thought. God had to explain to him that it wasn’t so.

Maybe Noah had more right to think such a thing. After all, wickedness was so rampant on the earth that God decided to wipe out all of humanity except for Noah and his wife and his sons and their wives. Eight people in all.

It gets so bad that you begin to understand the people who wrote the so-called “Imprecatory Psalms.” Imprecatory Psalms are those Psalms in which the writers prayed for God to bring disaster on their enemies. They weren’t just asking God to carry out revenge for the sake of revenge, though. They wanted God to intervene for them so that they could live as believers.

Doesn’t that about sum up our look at the world? We see rampant evil. We see Christian life being threatened on every side. Secularists constantly advocate for Christians to be pushed out of the mainstream of society and marginalized. Politicians are increasingly hostile to the morality of religious people.

II.

Into this comes Jesus with his parable of the weeds in the wheat. Jesus spoke in parables for several reasons. The story could make it easier to understand—and remember. The story was also an easy way to keep people’s attention; they would want to find out what happened in the story, allowing him to get to the moral of the story. In biblical terms we call it the tertium, or the point, of the story. One other reason Jesus spoke in parables was to conceal the meaning from those not interested.

In this particular case, Jesus didn’t explain the parable to all those listening from the shore while he taught them from a boat. The disciples waited to ask him about what it all meant until they were inside a house later that day.

“He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away” (Matthew 13:24-25, EHV).

Jesus’ choice of subject matter works quite well. Most people have some sort of flower garden or a lawn. It takes lots of care to keep the weeds out of it. Sometimes you might not be able to tell if a tiny emerging plant is a weed, or something you wanted growing there.

Jesus was more specific, however. The weeds were more than just your ordinary, garden variety weeds. The weed is a specific kind of weed. The Greek word refers to a weed called “darnel.” That weed is a type of rye grass whose seeds are poisonous. Additionally, darnel looks just wheat as the plants begin to grow. Only after the crop had begun to mature could you see that darnel was growing among the wheat.

Under Roman law it was a crime to sow darnel in a field for revenge. Wheat, if contaminated with darnel, would produce vomiting.

Jesus explained the weeds and the wheat like this: “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the Evil One. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the Devil” (Matthew 13:37-39, EHV).

Like darnel and wheat, believers and unbelievers are mixed together in the same field of this world. Sometimes it’s very difficult to tell the difference, especially at first. Believers and unbelievers have the same jobs; the same likes and dislikes; the same illnesses; the same customs; the same interests. It’s only when you get to the fruit that you can tell the difference.

III.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?’” (Matthew 13:28, EHV).

That would seem to make sense to us, wouldn’t it? Get rid of the darnel. Things would be so much easier for the wheat—for Christians—if there were no weeds all mixed in to make things difficult.

“No,” he answered, “because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest” (Matthew 13:29-30, EHV). The kind of weed that looks virtually identical to wheat would be difficult, at best, to separate and pull up. Roots would get all intertwined. Pull up some of the weeds, and inevitably some of the wheat would come up with it.

Christianity has some dark moments in the past. In the Crusades, for example, many believers became convinced being a proper servant of God meant that they should kill any who refused to embrace Christianity. But some who appear to be unbelievers might learn of Jesus and be brought to faith before the harvest of Judgment Day. We are not to prematurely end their time of grace—their opportunity to be brought to faith. Jesus said that the “good seeds” are the “sons of the kingdom,” or believers. Surely believers wouldn’t want to destroy the opportunity to come to faith simply because they so zealously tried to weed unbelievers out of the world.

Paul says in today’s Second Reading: “God’s wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who try to suppress the truth by unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18, EHV). Until Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead there will be people trying to suppress the truth by their unrighteousness—peddling their immoral morals. That’s just the way it is going to be. We are not the ones God intends to do the weeding.

“The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:39-42, EHV).

Judgment Day is coming. There will be a final reckoning for those who suppress the truth by their own unrighteousness.

It will be horrific for those who have rejected Jesus. This is why we are to be about the task of preaching the gospel of Jesus, not pulling out the weeds from the whole world. We don’t want anyone to be caught up by the angels in the bundles to be destroyed in the fiery furnace. The weeping and gnashing of teeth will be endless.

IV.

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:43, EHV).

As horrific as Judgment Day will be for the unbeliever, for the believer it will be a day filled with joy. Jesus—the Savior who gave his life on the cross to pay for the sins of all and to give his perfection to us in place of those sins—will bring us to heaven. We will shine like the sun there in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father.

“Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.” Remember the reasons Jesus used parables to teach? The last reason I mentioned was to conceal the meaning from those not interested. You have ears to hear. You are interested in what your Savior has to tell you.

Another reason for speaking in parables was to make the story easy to remember. Weeds growing up with the wheat until harvest time is easy to remember. It also makes it easy to remember the tertium—the moral—the point—of the story. Until Judgment Day there will always be both believers and unbelievers. Don’t let that distract you or keep you from living your life as a child of God.

The Lord Jesus will come. Your place with him in heaven is secure. You will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father forever and ever. Amen.