

Wheat and Weeds, Good and Evil

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[0:00] Friends, would you please be seated? Again, I just want to welcome you. My name is Hillary, if we haven't met. And I would love to meet you downstairs.! Lisa and I will be down there after the service.

We'll have coffee. If you're new, we'd love to meet you. Our head pastor, Pastor Thomas, is away for a couple weeks. And I checked in with him last night.

And he's doing great. He's feeling really refreshed. And he's praying for us. And sends his greetings and his prayers. So these last couple weeks, we've been looking at chapter 13 of Matthew's gospel. Which is a collection of several parables. And all of these parables are coming in response to this question of why are people rejecting Jesus' message?

Even John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner. And the one who baptized him, probably one of Jesus' best friends, asked Jesus, Are you the one who is to come?

[1:04] Or should we expect somebody else? And John's question is one that most people were probably asking. And it reveals the simple fact that the kingdom of heaven and Jesus as the Messiah were not what people expected.

So after the Sermon on the Mount, after all these healings and exorcisms that Matthew's been talking about, Jesus tries another way. He tells stories.

I was talking to a friend this week who said, Whenever I want my kids to pay attention to me, I start by saying, once upon a time. And they immediately, they clue in.

Because we love stories. And Jesus uses a similar phrase with each of these parables. Designed to get people to lock in and pay attention. He says, the kingdom of heaven is like.

So again, this idea of the kingdom of heaven to Jesus' listeners, People would have been like, oh, tell me what it's like. They want to know. So this morning, we're going to dig into that question. What's the kingdom of heaven like?

[2:10] We'll look at it in two parts. First, what does this parable tell us about the kingdom of heaven? And second, what does it mean for us? Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for your great love and your mercy. That you have lavished on us. That is more than we can possibly imagine. So Lord, from that place of being rooted in your love, Would we have ears to hear and eyes to see?

Would we listen well to you this morning? Thank you for your word. Would you nourish us with it? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. First, what does this parable tell us about the kingdom of heaven? So let's take a look at how Jesus' original audience Would have understood this parable.

Or heard this parable. Like all of Jesus' parables, This agrarian scene was something immediately compelling And relatable to Jesus' listeners. He always used these commonplace things That people were really familiar with.

[3:23] But even though these things were really common, Even though people were used to, They would immediately be able to have a visual image When he was talking about these things. Jesus also chose language that signaled Spiritually significant realities To his Jewish audience.

And that would have kind of served as a signpost To say, hey, there's something else going on here. Pause and think about this. So the choice of seed, of a sower, of an enemy, A harvest.

These were also spiritually significant realities. So we'll start by looking at these things, At these figures in this parable, Along with Jesus' explanation to the disciples. First, the sower goes out And he sows good seed in his field.

Jesus clearly identifies himself As the sower in this parable. But he uses this language with his disciples Of the son of man. And that would have triggered something For his disciples.

Because it points directly to Daniel 7, 13 and 14. Where the prophet Daniel writes, In my vision at night, I looked. And there before me was one like a son of man.

[4:36] Coming with the clouds of heaven. He goes on to describe the son of man As being given all authority, Glory, And sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language Worshipped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion That will not pass away. And his kingdom is one That will never be destroyed. So Jesus calling himself The son of man Is very significant.

He's telling us The kingdom that he's inaugurating Is the same kingdom That Daniel describes in his prophecy. Secondly, the field.

Jesus' field is the world. Now this was small When Jesus was ministering. The size about the size of New Jersey. Not very big. But it expanded.

Especially at the end of Matthew's gospel. He told his followers to go out And preach the gospel To all nations. And again, Jesus is setting up his sovereignty And his rule.

[5:42] He's saying, The kingdom of heaven is my kingdom. Third, the sower sows good seed. This image of seed in the Bible Stands for the word of God.

And the word of God Can be different things. It can be the scriptures. The holy scriptures. It can be word that's spoken. But it can also be a person. Remember, it says in the book of John In John's prologue, John chapter 1 The word was with God.

The word is Jesus. So when Jesus talks about this seed. Sowing this seed. He's bringing other people into this. People that have received And believed his message.

Who are hearing and obeying. The parable of the sower Comes just before this one. It identifies these as people Who bear crops for the kingdom.

But like a lot of Jesus' parables, There's a catch. There's something that's going to make us think. Probably multiple things. Hopefully multiple things. The enemy or the devil sows weeds.

[6:51] So this is definitely A very culturally specific thing. But the idea of an enemy Sowing weeds in someone's field Was not uncommon In this time period.

And we don't know how often it happened. But we do know there were Roman laws That addressed what to do If this happens. Like what are the consequences? What are the repercussions? And it could have been a way If you sowed weeds In your neighbor's field It could have been a way To sabotage competition.

To drive up prices. To get back at somebody. A dispute with your neighbor. Something like that. Well here with the enemy, The devil, It's all about sabotage.

But it's really important To notice the order. The enemy comes after the good seed. And that's because All the enemy can do Is corrupt And manipulate And twist What is good.

The enemy can't create. He's someone who entangles. Who destroys. Jesus says of him, The thief comes to steal And kill And destroy.

[7:59] I have come That they might have life. And have it to the full. And I also want to note here That in this parable There's not a confrontation Between the enemy And the sower Between the person That owns the field.

And why is that? Because Satan and Jesus Are not inverses. Jesus is the one With all the authority. There's no competition.

Satan does this Under cover of darkness. He has no power Compared to the Lord Jesus Christ. He's a defeated foe. And also notice That in this parable The enemy does not cause Any kind of lasting harm To the weed.

So let's talk a little bit About the weeds That Jesus is mentioning. So he uses this word Darnell. And Darnell was a specific Type of weed That was kind of a wheat imposter.

That's probably the best way To say it. It looked a lot like wheat. Especially in the early Stages of growth. And you really couldn't tell Until both plants Were pretty mature If you had Darnell Or wheat.

[9:15] And by that time The roots were enmeshed With one another. And so you couldn't harvest You couldn't start Pulling out the weeds Without potentially Harming the wheat. So you had to wait Until the harvest.

And if you didn't know What you were doing You shouldn't try To separate them. And if you didn't Separate them You just harvest them All together Then the flower Would be contaminated.

Because Darnell heads It's just like You know They're like wheat heads Darnell heads Are poisonous. So if you just say Like oh it's not That big a deal I'm just going to Mix it all together It

could actually Really harm people.

It could actually Cause blindness. But the point is It was possible To separate the good From the bad. To protect the wheat Even if there was Darnell. So when Jesus says These weeds are people Of the evil one.

Maybe these are people Who are overtly evil. But they could also be people Who seem okay. Externally. Just like the Darnell Seems okay. At first.

[10 : 20] People who are religious. Religious. People who may have External trappings Of faith. Maybe they use Religious language. They do religious activities.

But the big difference Is that they don't have An actual relationship With the living God. They have not been Transformed. These are people Who are sitting in darkness But who have the Appearance of light.

And then lastly The harvest And the harvesters Or the angels. So again Like the son of man The sower and the seed These were words That triggered meaning For people embedded In Jewish scripture.

Harvest is all over The Old Testament prophets As a sign of judgment. And angels were seen As carrying out God's divine purposes. They were his messengers And his agents.

So now that we've been Through the figures In this parable Let's connect All these threads And see what they tell us About the kingdom of heaven. So first The kingdom of heaven Is everlasting.

[11 : 29] It's ruled by A sovereign Powerful ruler. Jesus is that ruler. He is The kingdom of heaven. Secondly The kingdom of heaven Comes in two parts.

There's the inauguration. The planting of the seed. The inbreaking Of the kingdom That began With Jesus' incarnation. And that has already happened.

But then there's The consummation Of the kingdom to come. The end of the age That he talks about. And here's a huge point In this parable. The inbreaking kingdom Exists in a world Inhabited by evil.

And this was another twist. Something that Jesus Was trying to help His listeners understand. This combination Of the inbreaking kingdom And then the consummation Of the kingdom At the end of the age.

Sometimes we call this The already But not yet. This wasn't something People expected to hear.

They just expected The end of the age. Sort of a one and done scenario.

[12 : 34] They expected the kingdom Of heaven To be immediately pure. For evil to be obliterated. Peace to reign. And if that wasn't Immediately happening People were questioning.

Well is this The kingdom of heaven? He says it is But it doesn't look Like we thought it would. And so that's why There was a lot of rejection Of Jesus' message happening. And Jesus is using This parable to say Hey that's gonna happen.

It will eventually. But not yet. Now we don't have time To get into this fully. But I do want to Briefly touch On two main responses To God's judgment.

Because it does come up In this parable. And it's a hard thing To hear. Especially read out loud.

Right? They'll be burned. They'll be weeping And gnashing of teeth.

That's an image That can evoke a lot of fear. And so let's just talk About it for a little bit. So here's the thing. For Jesus' listeners Most of whom were Under oppressive Roman rule.

[13 : 36] Divine judgment Was really good news. And I think that's true For anyone Who's been abused. Who's been traumatized. Treated unjustly.

A victim. So imagine how A concentration camp survivor. Or someone whose entire family Has been killed in a genocide. Feels when they think About divine judgment.

They're begging for it. Right? And there's another group Who feels really uncomfortable With this language. That hears the phrase About the weeds being burned And thinks How could God be loving?

And banish someone forever? And whichever of these Two camps you tend towards I mean I think It's one of those things That we all kind of wrestle with.

I want to suggest That this whole time Between the already And the not yet Is to give the weeds A chance To become wheat. To give those That the enemy Has corrupted by evil The chance to turn From wickedness.

[14 : 49] Peter writes In 2 Peter 3.9 The Lord is patient With you Not wanting anyone To perish But everyone To come to repentance.

And here's the really Important takeaway For all of us. Y'all Everyone Starts as a weed As people of the enemy. Paul uses this phrase Children of wrath.

He says You were once Children of wrath. But the sower Is on a rescue mission. He came to get us To transfer us From the kingdom Of the enemy To the kingdom Of Jesus To transform us From weeds to wheat.

But there will come A day When those who Persist in evil And who reject That invitation From the Lord Jesus Will receive God's justice. And so to answer That question To come back To that question Of how could A loving God Banish someone forever?

The answer is He doesn't. C.S. Lewis Says it better Than I ever could In the great divorce. He says There are only Two kinds of people In the end.

[15 : 58] There are those Who say to God Thy will be done And there are those To whom God says In the end Thy will be done. All that are in hell Choose it.

Without that self-choice There could be no hell. No soul That seriously And constantly Desires joy Will ever miss it. Those who seek Find To those who knock It is opened.

What does this mean For us then? And for Jesus' listeners? Three main takeaways here. This is not the time For judgments But judgment Will come.

Friends We will not be The ones Who do the judging. We need to be Really careful About assuming Who the wheat And the weeds are.

Those we might expect To be part of the kingdom Might not be. And those who are Unexpected Might be. This was true In Jesus' day. There were a lot Of people Unexpected That were part Of the kingdom.

[17 : 13] Take who Jesus First revealed himself To as the Messiah. A Samaritan woman. An outcast Among outcasts. Who did he count Among his followers?

He counted tax collectors. Religious zealots Who hated Rome. Women who had No status In society. People who were Poverty stricken.

People who were Wealthy. People who Had been healed From leprosy. Delivered From demons. Raised from the dead. People that would Have been considered Weak And despised And unlovable.

That were Unexpected. And most often Jesus' biggest Opponents Were externally Religious. Even among The twelve apostles There was someone False.

Judas Iscariot Who betrayed Jesus To the Romans To the To the Jews And turned him Over to be crucified. Jesus doesn't care A wit About externals.

[18 : 24] He cares About the heart. About people Who drop everything And go When he says Follow me. And the same Is true For us.

We tend To assume That people Like us Are righteous. But I think It would be good For all of us To ask ourselves This question.

How often Do we make An effort To spend time With people Who are really Different than we are? Elizabeth Oldfield Is a British author Who just wrote A book called Fully Alive.

She also has A podcast Where It's a podcast Called The Sacred And she hosts People that are Kind of all over The map Belief wise And she calls People that are Different than us She really exhorts People in her book To hang out With other people That are She uses the term NLMs Not like me's And she says The goal Is an agreement But understanding And something I really appreciate About her approach Is that When you listen To these conversations On her podcast There's a way That it sharpens Discernment What's truly evil And what's a Difference of opinion What's true fruit And what's External posturing And figuring this out Takes a lot of Patience A lot of humility And a lot of courage And frankly Y'all

It's not our job Christians are To be out In the world In God's field With whomever God has placed Us next to To love them To be in Relationship with them To help the weeds Become wheat So remember What Jesus says To the servants When they say Well do you want us To pull up these weeds He says no Because you could Harm the wheat When we start Trying to sort People We can cause A lot of harm We have to Trust the Lord With that Secondly Suffering and evil Shouldn't surprise us In this time Between the already And the not yet We live in this world That's still inhabited By evil And that's a hard Thing To reconcile The evil In the suffering In the world With the promise Of God's kingdom Or even with God's power And his love Let's come back

[21 : 02] To John the Baptist Question at the Beginning of the Sermon Are you the one Who is to come Or should we Look for another So John didn't Get to ask that To Jesus directly He sent some

Of his followers And that was Because he was Sitting in prison He had been Unjustly thrown In jail By Herod And immediately After this chapter Of Matthew's Gospel Herod orders John's beheading In the middle Of a drunken Party And John's Experience The story Of John's Life Is not uncommon When you look At saints Throughout history When you look At the Apostles All of them Except for the Apostle John Were martyred For their faith And it would Seem like If you're just Looking at the Physical reality That evil wins Doesn't it But let's think

About the passage That Tom just Read for us In Romans Because it shows This is something Different Instead of being Hopeless The decay And the evil And the pain Are birth Pangs I remember When I was Pregnant I did a lot Of pregnant Lady Diligent pregnant Lady sort Of reading And listening To things And one of The things That stuck With me Was they Encouraged You in labor To cry out To moan To groan It can help You And it might Sound strange Why is this Because it's An expression It's a release Of the big Intense Difficult work Your body Is doing And that's True for the Spiritual groaning Too It's okay To groan In fact It'll help It's honest It's saying This isn't Okay I don't think This is what I don't think This is what The Lord Created the world To be Jesus groaned And the Greek word For groaning Here Is one That Mark Uses In his Gospel In chapter 7 Verse 34 And Jesus Is about To heal A man Who can't Hear And just Before he He heals Him He groans As he prays And it's The same Word that Paul uses It's this Groaning That expresses A longing For things To be made Right It's an Ake At the Pain And the Brokenness Surrounding Us But it's Not a Groaning That's Hopeless Because it Recognizes That this Isn't The end Paul and Jesus both Use this Incredibly Hopeful Beautiful Language To describe What those Who belong To God Have to Look forward To Paul writes I consider That our Present Sufferings Are not Worth Comparing To the Glory that Will be Revealed In us Jesus Says The righteous Will shine Like the Sun In my Father's House I would Encourage you This week To spend A little Time If you Have a Book of Common Prayer To look Up the Anglican Funeral Liturgy It might Be one Of my Favorite Liturgies In the Book of Common Prayer Because at Its heart It's a Resurrection Service It's Recognizing In the Face of Death That we Have this Hope So listen To these Words that Are said As the Body is Taken Out of The Church This is The Prayer Christ Is risen From the Dead Trampling Down Death By Death And Giving Life To Those In The Tomb The Son Of Righteousness Is Gloriously Risen Giving Light To Those Who Sat In Darkness And In The Shadow Of Death The Lord Will Guide Our Feet Into The Way Of Peace Having Taken Away The Sin Of The World Christ Will Open The Kingdom Of Heaven To All Who Believe In His Name Saying Come Oh Blessed Of

My Father Inherit The Kingdom Prepared For You Inherit The Kingdom Prepared For You Paul Says We're Heirs That Means One Day We Will Inherit This Kingdom And This Leads To Our Last Point How Do We Know That The Inheritance Is Coming Because The Holy Spirit Is Our Down Payment To Deposit Paul Uses The First Fruits To Describe The Spirit's Presence In The Life Of Believers The Spirit Anticipates And Guarantees What's Coming The Spirit Bridges The Gap Between The Already And The Not Yet And Friends This Spirit Is The One Who Opens Our Eyes To The Power Of God That's Available To All Who Believe So Where Does This Leave All Of Us This Morning

[26:07] First If You're Not Sure What You Believe And If You've Struggled With Some Of These Questions We've Mentioned That Is Okay It's Okay To Ask These Questions About God Are You Loving What Does This Mean See If You Can Find A Quiet Place To Sit And Ask The Lord Those Questions This Week Ask Him To Speak To You And Remember Christ Will Open The Kingdom Of Heaven To All Who Believe In His Name Saying Come Oh Blessed Of My Father And Inherit The Kingdom Prepared For You The Lord Longs For You To Come Home He Loves You He Loves You He Loves You He's Holding His Hand Out To You Will You Take It And If You're Suffering Or If You're Looking At The State Of The World And Groaning And Longing

For Renewal If You're Grieving Beloved Know That You Have A Savior Who Groans And Grieves With You And Know That Evil And Grief And Decay And Sadness Will Not Have The Final Word Jesus Christ The Savior Will Have The Final Word And One Day He Will Bring You Into His Father's House Where You Will Shine Like The Son In Glory Reigning With The Lord Jesus Christ Forever Let's Pray Lord Would You Expand Our Hearts To Be Be Be To Receive More Of You Lord Pour Your Spirit Out On Us Thank You For The Gift Of Your Spirit Thank You That You Are Mighty And Strong

To Save All Who Cry Out To You Lord I Pray That Those Who Are Sitting In Darkness Would Come Into Your Glorious Light As You Call Them!

Pray For The Broken Hearted And Place That They Would Feel You That They Would Know You That You Would Sustain Them And Lord As A Community Will We Be Those Who Bring This Truth To A World That Is Needy And Broken and desperately in need of healing.

We pray that you would flood this city with your grace, your mercy, and your healing. Give us your imagination and give us a willingness to go when you call us, when you say, follow me, to follow.

[29:02] Thank you that you are good and that we can trust you. And we pray these things in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.