

The wheat and the weeds

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[0:00] Father, we remember the general context of Jesus who has been displaying miracles in front of many people.

! Perhaps some of us would think that if he was walking here and we saw one or two of those, then we'd really believe much more than we do. Yet there were so many who had witnessed this and just were more concerned that maybe this man was knocking them out of their position.

And they were hardened in their hearts. And we ask you, Lord, to help us to remember that the man who spoke these words was not just one of many prophets.

He was the Son of God. He had testified to his authority with signs and wonders. And he had shown himself to be one with authority.

Lord, we are aware of many of the miracles that we hear about in the Scriptures. Stilling storms, speaking, showing he was the Lord. Lord, we ask that in our own hearts today you would help us to take his word seriously, even if some of it we are uncomfortable with.

[1:21] Lord, help us, we pray. And for any here who are not clear on whether they know you, and as they see how the end of this story has a very stark difference between the destination of those who are in Christ and those who are not believing in Jesus, pray that you would convict and that you would work and that you would bring your mercy and salvation to this place.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. So I mentioned in my prayer that some who had seen so much of Jesus' life had not been won over.

And Jesus had started to talk in parables. And although I think others may have just briefly mentioned this recently, let's just go to verses 10 to 16 of chapter 13.

Because as he is now teaching in a different way, verse 10, the disciples came to him and asked, Why do you speak to the people in parables?

And he replied, and some of this may appear quite cryptic to us, But because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

[2:49] Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have, will be taken away from them. And then he carries on, and he quotes apart from Isaiah in verse 14, You will be ever hearing, but never understanding, ever seeing, but never perceiving.

For this people's heart, and this is what I was saying in the prayer, Has become calloused, and they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, And I would hear with, heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears because they hear.

And I'm not going to go into a full explanation of that, except to, in the same way as I was praying, That it is the hardness of people's hearts that was reacting to Jesus.

And that when Jesus is around, and he's doing his miracles, and he's preaching, People don't stay the same. They are either drawn to him, and I hope all of us are, increasingly.

[4:00] But there are some who hear his words, and they think, hmm, they're moving away. And I hope this passage will, perhaps when you don't think about the consequences, And you think, oh no, I'm very happy with my life, I don't need this sort of stuff.

But when you are confronted with the consequences of rejecting Jesus, This parable is very much a poke in the eye, and a wake-up call to consider.

So let's, where I want to go, I just want to tell the story. It's a very simple story. It doesn't mean that the meaning isn't quite hard-hitting. So we'll go through this story, and we'll go through, We're not left in much doubt about what it might have meant, Because Jesus, in the second part of what we read, tells us.

So we can't say, oh, it might mean this, it might mean that. It's perfectly clear. And I have picked five lessons. I mean, I think at the end, you might find that you could pick a couple more.

And if there is time, we could probably just allow a little to see If anyone else wants to draw something else out of the passage. But let me just deal with that, and we'll see where we are and what time it is.

[5:15] So you'll also remember that not long ago, we've dealt with the parable of the sower. So we have a few things going on with arable farming pictures.

And if you just want to briefly compare it with the sower, Both have a sower and a field, sealed, a seed and a crop yield. And the evil one appears in both, and you could look down to verses 19 and 39.

But in the parable of the sower, what is the evil one doing? I'm sure you know it ever so well. He's snatching away the seed, the good seed. But in this one, he's there sowing tares, which is weeds, among the wheat.

So he's actually sowing some bad seed. So in the parable of the sower, all the seed is good, but here there are two types of seed. And in the parable of the sower, the emphasis is on the reception given to the seed.

What kind of soil are you when the word of God is given? But in this one, this is on the sower's commands to the servants long before harvest, when they realize there's a problem.

[6:34] And the sower's commands to the reapers at the harvest. So there's just some broad things to show you the difference. So this parable, let's just go back to the story.

And we hear about, of course, you do know, I hope you do, that, of course, compared to our culture, this is a very agricultural community.

So sowing seeds in field is a very common thing. So we see a man sowing good seed. That's all very normal, isn't it? But it says here, what a despicable thing comes up next.

It says, an enemy, while they were sleeping, after the good seed had been sown, an enemy comes amongst, in this field, where all the good seed's been sown, and he's placing all this bad seed.

And you think, why would you do that? Can you think of any good reason? No, this is just malicious. What's the intent? That the weeds will grow, and at the very least, that the wheat crop will not be quite as good.

[7:43] It'll be stifled. Some of the nutrients in the ground, the weeds will pinch, etc. It's just a dastardly act. What can you think of, compared to today, someone who doesn't like you coming to your house and spraying graffiti on your front wall?

It's just horrible. So then we next see that there are some servants of the man who is sowing the seed in the field.

Verse 27. And they obviously think, surely you sowed good seed here, didn't you? Why are we seeing all these weeds? I dare say a few weeds in a big field was probably normal, but there was a lot here.

And they were thinking, what is going on? And the owner says, without any doubt, where did these weeds come from? An enemy did this. It doesn't immediately name who that enemy is.

But an enemy did this. So the servants are interested. Well, surely we should get on and do something. Let's do our best to get them out now, so that we've got a nice field of wheat, and it all goes swimmingly through to the harvest.

[9:01] But the farmer's response is, and it's not instinctive to us, is it? Let them both grow together.

And then we'll remove the tares, the weeds, at the harvest time. Now, I put up a picture. I found, because I think none of us are great agricultural farmer people.

Maybe some of you have parents who were. But here is a picture I found that at least shows that at an early stage, there's a bit of difference.

But if you were a servant in this farmer's field, and you wanted to take this into your own hands and start pulling out where you thought the tares were, you know, if we were all going out here grabbing 100 items, we probably wouldn't get them all right, would we?

Whilst we're trying to pull up weeds, we'd be pulling up some tares. They're both green. They look at an early stage quite similar. Later on, though, the wheat seed turns a white or a gold colour, and I'm sure we've all seen in the fields how it fills out to a heavy head, and the head even becomes so full that it rather bows over.

[10:30] Now, if you were then going to go through the field and think which one's which, you've got an easier task, clearer. And also, the tares stay green, they stay upright, and actually their seeds turn black.

And I found this also, which confirms some of what we've just said, but it also points out, if you were wondering why they had to be separated at all, that the seeds of the tares or the wheat are poisonous.

And when animals or people eat them, make them sick, I think if you ate enough of them, it might even be fatal. So, in terms of what you do at the end of the process, the farmer is in no doubt, when you're trying to get a store of wheat, you've got to separate these things.

Now, a little aside, this isn't the strongest part of what I'm saying, but I couldn't help but find some interest in the fact that wheat and Christians have something in common. And wheat doesn't have very deep roots, but it grows very tall.

And all I'm trying to get is the picture of something that is rooted in this well, but it's sort of growing upwards. And eventually, it gets plucked out of the ground on its way. And I just thought, this is just a slightly light-hearted thought, really.

[11:52] It grows upwards. And I'm just thinking of other scriptures like this. Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated, at the right hand of God.

Set your mind up there, not on earthly things. So, it's just a slightly light-hearted thought, but it is a plant with a shallow root, and it grows tall. It doesn't last long.

It grows, it ripens, it bears fruit, and then it passes off the scene. We don't either in this world, do we? Great promises of a joy in eternity for our souls, but we have this in common.

And the other thing which I think is interesting is that wheat has a head, which when mature, bows down under its weight. And there's a picture of wheat bowing over.

And I couldn't help but think there's a hint here of some modesty. That when it's full of its glory, it's not standing up for out shouting, it's just bowing down.

[13:00] Light-hearted thoughts, but some ideas of how we have things in common with wheat. So, then we move on to how this is interpreted.

Go ahead to verse 36. You'll notice, of course, the parable was, the story was told in a very public place, but this is, he's back in a house with his disciples here, and they're asking, explain the meaning of this parable.

Couldn't be clearer. The sower is the son of man, that's Jesus. That's in verse 37. The field is the world. Good seeds are the people of the kingdom.

And the tares, or the weeds, are the people of the evil one. Already, we're getting this very black and white contrast. And we're kind of looking for the other category of people, but there isn't one. It's either good seed, wheat, or it's tares, poisonous, and just to be discarded and burned at the end. The enemy that sowed the tares is the devil.

[14:14] The harvest is the end of the age. Harvesters are angels. You can't mess with angels. They're quite strong. They're not just little dainty, flitting around creatures that go where you blow them.

And it says, and it's strong words, verse 41, the Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

And it goes on to say that they will be thrown into a blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It says the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

So, lesson one. Here are my five lessons. There may be others. But lesson one, we don't like to face this fact too often, but this world we're living in, the one we wake up in tomorrow, it's not all

cozy, cuddly.

I mean, most of the people we'll talk to tomorrow are quite nice and reasonable, aren't they? But actually, when you look behind the scenes and in that spiritual realm that we are not privy to all the details, this is a war zone.

[15:38] There is the picture here. And let me just remind you what it said at the beginning of the parable. I didn't emphasize that. Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed a seed.

And then there's someone else, an enemy, right? You know, so the kingdom of heaven, perhaps as the world sees it, it's about wheat and weeds alongside.

And the immediate reaction is not to pull out the weeds immediately, but they let them grow together. You remember what we heard in the story?

So we don't like this very much, but, and it's all very, too close to comfort. This is a field. The kingdom of God is like this field. And there are weeds and wheat alongside.

Let them grow together. So it just reminds me that the enemy who in this parable came in and did something dastardly, every day he's trying to do dastardly things to us.

[16:42] We don't like it. We wish we were in a much more comfortable place. But the world we live in is a war zone. He is there to harm us. Yes, he is trying to. Nothing he likes better than just spoiling the crop, making it harder for the wheat to grow.

And I'm trying to think, and you may be able to help me even if we have a brief comment, comments at the end. I mean, we have to accept that around us, there are people perhaps very much under the umbrella of what you call Christian who are not Christians.

They talk the talk, but do they walk the walk? There will be churches where the whole Bible is not taught.

Maybe they emphasize one aspect but try and forget some. And they end up with a gospel that is no gospel at all. And we might begin to think, oh, I know exactly, you know, that person's not a Christian.

Now, that's the bit where you have to be a little bit careful because we don't really know the heart. But in many ways, some of these other people, you might be thinking in our church, I think more likely you're thinking of a wider group of what is called church.

[18:00] And you see some who are doing things that are so different and yet it's under the umbrella of what is called Christian. And it just doesn't feel right. So there's just a simple warning at this point that we live in this war zone.

I'm not going to go there at the moment, but you know well enough in Ephesians 6, all that armor of God that we are encouraged to wear, but we are in a war zone. Be on your guard. The second lesson, which I think stares us in the face here, is when you look at the fact that all of us are, in this story, either wheat or tares, we want to be pretty sure when you see what happens at the end to the tares, we want to be pretty sure that we're the wheat, don't we?

Are you a wheat or a tare? Because the prospect for the tares at the end of this story is bleak indeed.

It is discarded and into an everlasting fire. Well, it doesn't say everlasting here in this one, but there are other passages that we can refer to on that. But I just pause because usually with these parables there is a central point and I think we're getting it.

But you can't imagine in this story, and if you understand anything about farming, a weed cannot change into a piece of wheat. Not in this story.

[19:33] But in the parallel of there being people who are people of the devil and people of God, we're desperate to try and get that grey area in the middle, but this is very black and white, it is possible for people who are not yet in Christ to move from being a son heavily influenced, dominated by the devil, to shift and become embracing Christ.

Because it says, whoever turns from sin and trusts in Christ as the only saviour, they can change, you can change, from belonging to the evil one to being in the kingdom.

So are you sure? I think it's a question we all think about when we're looking at a passage like this. Are you sure you belong to Christ's kingdom?

Or in some ways do you feel you're just going through the motions? You're reading this, you're saying some prayers, but it's not real to you. If you feel it's not real to you, this is a good time to go find some friend and talk.

Don't let it pass. I think someone said even about, perhaps more in America, of Billy Graham's crusades. And perhaps they have some very large churches over there with a lot of people on their membership role.

[20:59] And I think Billy Graham near the end of his days was saying that perhaps his greatest results or people coming through were from the nominal roles of people in the churches.

That was where so many who were just nominal and not sure really where they were. And they come through. And he was just very glad to see that happening. So my third lesson is accept that God is the final judge and to be patient.

Now we're not expressly told in the story who the servants are, but they're clearly on the side of the man who is sowing the good seed. And they're very concerned, they look in this field, it should be showing wheat only.

And so they want to do something about it. And we touched on it, didn't we? We look out, whether it's in parts of this church or more likely perhaps in other areas where people call themselves churches, and we're thinking impatiently maybe, I'd like to do something and shut this down that's causing a bad witness.

And this is where there may be some comments at the end because I think we do know that sometimes maybe Daniel in his prayers when God's people were in disgrace prays wanting to see God's name honoured.

[22:23] There is a sort of praying that says that this is under the name of the church and it's dishonouring your name. Very good, isn't it, to say, come on, please God, stamp that out. But ultimately we're not to wade in and do the pulling it to bits unless we have special opportunity because we'll probably get it wrong and we'll probably make more of a mess than we thought we would.

We do need to be discerning about others in this world, maybe even in our church, who do not belong to Christ, probably not as we're thinking about people in our church, but we do need to be discerning as we are aware of each other.

But our primary job is to evangelise and not to judge. From time to time, though, in churches there are discipline issues, always with the aim of restoring someone who has named the name of Christ but perhaps they're just not living that way anymore and there are things to be done.

But ultimately it is only God who sees our hearts and knows if we are his. But as we've touched on, God will one day we doubt of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

So he is in charge of that and he will do it at the proper time and much as though we might be tempted to go in there and try and start the cleaning up process, this passage I think is cautioning us to be patient and to accept that in this world alongside the wheat the tares are growing and that's just how it is at the moment and we've just got to live with that.

[24:13] My fourth lesson and there's only one more after this and this is where as you get to the end of this passage and it says very clearly that the tares are thrown into a furnace and when the explanation comes this is the sons of the devil the people of the evil one they will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

this is a grim picture and it's a place where there's no turning back at the moment day to day people who are ignoring Christ there may be another opportunity when they might start to take things seriously but as I just thought this is a very severe side of God's character I just wanted to make sure that we didn't leave this without touching on another aspect of his character and I just want to pull a few verses together to concentrate on his goodness and his severity when I was opening in prayer I was just saying we try and pick and choose things so we have read that just if you you'll be familiar with it but later on in Matthew 25 we have the other well known parable about final judgment about sheep and goats and I only put this in because it adds he will say to those on his left depart

from me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels they will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life it's just we don't want it to be so eternal but that is what the Bible says it's an eternal good for those who are in Christ but it is an eternal punishment for those who have ignored and rejected

Jesus so we who are sinful find this very hard to understand we wouldn't do this quite this way we just think this is a bit difficult and we have to pause and think God's nature is so holy that it's actually he cannot coexist with sin that is not dealt with he is so pure and holy now we can't go there in our imagination we can't quite go there because we're so stained with sin when we confront it with someone else even someone who's done some heinous things if we see any sign at any point way down the line if they're turning we want to say there's always an opening but God has said no when you die or when Jesus comes again that's the end of the opportunity so the problem really is as we consider where we get our ideas from many follow private religious hunches rather than learning about

God from his word many that we know just think all the religions are the same so yeah your religious book says this but mine says this they wouldn't think for a moment that this is the one that says the right thing many have ceased to recognize the reality of their own sinfulness they think they know better and as such they would be hostile to a God who takes sin seriously many think God is good but he can't also be severe so we need to allow the Bible to shape our total picture of what God is like I'll just quote you a bit from Isaiah 66 there these are the ones the Lord looks on with favour those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word so I think many of us who have been walking with God for many years this is not the primary thing we do that we're always trembling and it's not like we are knee jerking with fear on every movement but there is a sense that on the big picture God's word speaks with some authority from a God who was made who stands outside of time and who is so almighty and really if we are going to even foolishly think for a moment like to be pure without any stain of sin who inhabits eternity and think oh you know I would be thinking differently we can't really go there but we can tremble at his word remember when God proclaimed his name to Moses and I just draw a verse here that does talk at the end here about punishment but when

[29:26] God proclaimed his name to Moses the Lord the compassionate and gracious God this is just drawing attention to some other aspects of God's character slow to anger abounding in love and faithfulness maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness rebellion and sin yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished but I'm just saying if all we've got in this passage is the bit about the punishment at the end there is several things mentioned there about his compassion and mercy slow to anger and it would be fair to say if you just trace through the Old Testament his people who were told at the very beginning when the law was given to them look if you follow these ways it will be good for you but if you depart from them there will be consequences and there were and there were prophets were sent to warn them but even then the people's hearts were very hard and they still had to be chastised so there are many aspects we've touched on there

Psalms 107 I'm not going to give lots of examples here but it does give other examples of his goodness and it starts off saying give thanks to the Lord for he is good and his love endures forever and if you were to read it!

you would find that God's people are getting into various messes but at four different points in the Psalm we hear exactly the same phrase comes back one sort of mess they got into then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress and then something else happened so this is a God who loves his people he will correct them but when they call out to him he will deliver them from their distress and then I wanted to turn to Romans 11 12 because it's just the title of this section about goodness and severity do turn over to Romans 11 because it says in that verse consider then the kindness and sternness of God but I just didn't want to quote that out of context and this is a section in Roman about engrafted branches and it's on the theme of the fact that the

Jewish people had been they were the people who had had the story about Jesus first but by and large they hadn't taken it right and if I read from verses 17 onwards saying if some of the branches

have been broken off and you thought and you thought a wild olive shoot because he's talking to the Gentiles here and the branches broken off as it were the Jewish people or some of them and you thought a wild olive shoot have been grafted in among others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches you will say then branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in granted but they were broken off because of unbelief and you stand by faith do not be arrogant but tremble for if God did not spare the natural branches he will not spare you either and then the verse I quote consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God sternness to those who fell but kindness to you provided that you continue in his kindness otherwise you also will be cut off and there's also this ray of hope that if they who have been cut off do not persist in unbelief they will be grafted in again this was the theme of the teaching about how the Jews had largely rejected the gospel and the Gentiles were being welcomed in and the final part of this if it's all been a little grim in theme there is a hope here that the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father that is the prospect for those who are the people of

[34:00] God this shining I think does start now because when we repent and come to God it says if you're not aware of it I'm sure most of you are that the spirit of God is given and that's what helps us to testify that we're children of God but that spirit also is working in us and changing us and maybe to start with we thought this Christian thing was I should do this should do that and everything in me doesn't really want to but as you go on with God for years I think you start to think I!

the people couldn't look at him so I quote a bit from Philippians I think the verse is at the end coming up continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you do everything without grumbling or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God in a warped and crooked!

generation that sounds like a field full of wheat and crooked generation but then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life shining yeah so just recapping just pulling those lessons together again briefly we live in a messy battle ground a war zone wish it wasn't so but it is are you a wheat or a tare are you in the kingdom of God or not and if you're not clearly aware that you are in the kingdom of God think very hard about that position because there isn't a neutral ground you're either in or in the language of this passage you are a child of the devil you may be a lovely person doing lots of good things but in the black and white thing this is all about how you've!

in the story but you can change from being outside of Christ to knowing him we do have a very real enemy and the devil will certainly not want people turning to Christ be patient and wait for God's final action in judgment in case you have that tendency some of us might try and think we've got to clean up everything right now separating!

of the tares and the wheat is absolutely obvious in the farming thing that it had to be done and God will do the same at the end of time and remember if you do come across these hard passages about God's severity at the end remember to think of the whole picture of God to remember his goodness as well remember his long suffering patience he doesn't really want anyone to perish so he reveals his nature in the Bible and we do well to not think we know better and to pick at bits that we think we like but isn't it lovely to think as we look forward with all our thoughts that one day we will be shining in his kingdom in the kingdom of the father we will shine and it starts now but it gets better doesn't it but then we go back to the very last thing that was read to us he who has an ear let him hear and if we touched on what

[38:27] Jesus is doing with the parables I hope all of us here tonight are being drawn towards God and wanting to be sure of all this but I fear and I hope there aren't any that some will be thinking this is a bit stark I think I know better God can't be like that be so careful you really know better than God what will happen one day what will happen beyond death in that world that we know so little about be very careful he who has an ear let him hear so I'm done there and there is a song a