

Parable of the Wheat and Weeds

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Date: 22 May 2022

Preacher: Adam Collison

[0 : 00] So we're going to read two parts of chapter 13 from verse 24 to verse 30 and then verse 36 to 43.

He put another parable before them saying, The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?

He said to them, An enemy has done this. So the servants said to him, Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat amongst them.

Let both grow together until the harvest and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned.

[1 : 07] But gather the wheat into my barn. Verse 36. Then he left the crowds and went into the house, and his disciples came to him saying, Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.

He answered, The one who sows the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear. Amen. Amen. Well, good morning, everyone.

It really is a privilege to be up here and open the word with you all this morning. This is week two of our five-week series where we have some of the lay members of the congregation preaching through the various parables that Jesus was teaching us in Matthew.

[2 : 28] And we do enjoy a lot of really good teaching here, don't we? Good times in the word, and we have many capable teachers across our congregation. And it's really a blessing to spend time each week opening God's word together and considering it.

A series like this is really quite helpful to have five different preachers, because we're looking at five distinct and different aspects of the one kingdom. As Jesus has told different parables to kind of turn the diamond in our hands and shine the light in a different way and highlight a different aspect of this glorious kingdom that's coming to be.

And these are key aspects. That's why Jesus gave us these parables and why Matthew so faithfully recorded them for us. We enjoy that privilege position of being able to gather and look back, learn from our great Lord and just marvel at our God and creator.

But life is still hard, isn't it? It seems we find ourselves having to struggle to hold to biblical values against the current of society that's trying to get further and further away.

Autonomy is now such a part of our society and an individual's rights that even the concept that we might live our lives by an external moral standard has become deeply offensive to people.

[3 : 58] And it's hard to see that changing any time soon. If Jesus' resurrection really did triumphantly usher in a new kingdom, how do we orient ourselves in a society turning away from his teachings?

Why do we feel the pain of friendship strained? At the least the weight of those awkward silences, judgmental silences. And at the more extreme end, close family ties broken just for trying to negotiate with integrity, living who we are now in Christ.

Well, this morning, we're going to see just how much our God cares for us, even as we await the perfection of his kingdom to be realised in full.

We're now residents of that kingdom, living in aliens amongst the brokenness we see in this world, from morning to evening, day in, day out. So this week we're following on from Matt last week.

It's important to remember, though, that this is a distinct parable. We're again using a farming story, a farming metaphor, to help us understand the kingdom in a tangible sense.

[5 : 11] But we need to be really careful this morning not to bring the four soils into the wheat paddy. Rather, this is a separate story with a separate aspect of the kingdom that we need to learn.

It's going to be a particular challenge for us this week because this parable of the wheat is only in the Gospel of Matthew, so it's a lot less familiar to us than some of the other parables that pop up in multiple Gospels and different accounts.

But like with the four soils, as we're looking at this aspect of the kingdom through a farming analogy, we're fortunate that when Jesus' fishermen and disciples confused came and sought him out in private later, he explained it all again.

So we've got not just the parable, but this detailed explanation to fishermen of what was going on with this agricultural parable. And we're going to benefit immensely from having it spelt out in the second telling as well.

So although there are dangers in misunderstanding parables, at their core parables are stories, and stories are a very powerful way of communicating to us.

[6 : 25] They teach us an understanding at a different level to just a list of facts. If I were to ask you, what does it mean to be an Australian? I doubt that you would proceed to rattle off the Constitution or sing me a rousing rendition of the National Anthem.

It's far more likely you would tell me the story of the Anzacs or waltzing Matilda or the latest exploits of one of our many national sporting teams. These stories just resonate in a different way to a list of facts.

And so it is with parables. But as Matt helpfully highlighted for us last week, we need to do the legwork to make sure we're understanding what Jesus intended for us. And we're going to do that together this morning.

So if you'd like to open up your Bible to Matthew 13, verse 24, you can follow along in the text as we walk through it. And we'll start here with a clear identification that it is a parable, and specifically it's a parable about the kingdom of heaven.

A man, who will later be identified to represent Jesus himself, sows good seed in the field. Then an enemy deceptively sows weeds amongst the wheat that was planted.

[7 : 40] And already we've come across one of the traps of parables. There are lots of details included in a parable. Some of those are there to teach us, and some of the other details are just there to facilitate the story.

I like to think of the movie The Lion King. It's the story of young Simba growing up in a pride of lions. He has an evil uncle, Scar, and a good father, Mufasa. Now if we think about the lionesses, there's his mum, his friend, Nala, and his friend's mum, and then, well, a lot of other ones.

They're integral to the story. You can't be a lion and have a pride of lions without there being a lot of lionesses. But while they're in the key events of the story, we don't even know their names. They really don't add, and they kind of blur into the background.

Here, in this parable, the men being asleep while the devil sows the weeds is like the lionesses. It's a key part of the story.

It's important for it to function, but it's not the key teaching point. We can be confident that it's not the key teaching point because Jesus runs through the disciples explicitly, and this isn't what the parable is about.

[9 : 04] What does unfold, though, seems to us really weird, doesn't it? Sowing a weed amongst the wheat just seems like a very odd thing to do. But it actually would have been quite identifiable and relatable for the audience at the time.

In fact, under Roman law, to sow a weed, this particular weed called Darnell, among wheat of someone as an act of revenge, is actually a specific criminal crime with a code and punishment

assigned.

Darnell itself is a plant that's related to wheat, and as it grows, it looks just like wheat until the head of the grain starts to form.

And if you look at verse 26, when it's talking about produced grain, that's really what it's talking about. It's when the head of the grain starts to form, you can tell that the wheat is different to the weeds.

The young wheat looks pretty much the same. But now we can distinguish between the two, and it becomes obvious to the helpers that there are weeds in this paddock that up to that point it just look like wheat.

[10:12] Again, it's not a major thing. It's just another detail that we need to understand to get the story to progress without it being the point of the story.

So the servants, who are identified as angels, and when Jesus explains it in full, now see what's going on. There's wheat and weeds in this paddock. And they go to their master confused.

What are the weeds doing here? Surely this isn't looking like the kingdom that Jesus has been talking about. This isn't the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, as he taught his disciples to pray in chapter 6.

Weeds surely are contrary to God's good character. But once they raise the issue, you see, the situation is not a surprise to Jesus. He's across it.

He knows that the weeds are there and where they've come from. And he can answer all of their questions while affirming that indeed they're not true to his character, they're not from him. An enemy has planted the weeds amongst the good seed.

[11:19] Naturally, the angels want to sort it out right now. Let's pull out the weeds. But no, Jesus is across it. If that's what he wanted, he would have had it done already.

He is in complete control of the situation. Notice the care for his church, as he's not willing to risk uprooting the wheat in the process of removing the weeds.

Let both grow together, he declares in verse 30. Let both grow together until the harvest. Jesus isn't going to let this abomination stand. It will be addressed.

But not yet. He's going to address it in such a way that is of no risk to his people. To feel the full weight of the significance of these statements, we need to consider where Jesus is in time as he describes these events.

Jesus is teaching these parables on the cusp of his kingdom being realised. The book of Matthew is rapidly approaching Jesus' death and resurrection. But this is before.

[12:22] This is a parable of prophecy. It's describing the people, and most particularly to his disciples, how things are going to be. And it's quite confronting for a Jewish audience who are looking for a Messiah to come and overturn the Romans, restore the natural order of things with the kingdom of Israel being a kingdom here on earth right then and there.

Like the angels, we're also confused by this description. If Jesus' triumph is at the cross, if his victory is displayed and sealed at the resurrection, then surely we should be looking forward to a world without tears where every eye has been dried.

A world of peace where man is free to serve God faithfully. We're sitting the other side of the death and resurrection, aren't we?

Looking back, we know that's not the world the disciples will see. Indeed, indeed, under Jesus' kingship, most of them will be executed for following him, following the risen king in a world that is still in open rebellion.

And it's that same period of time we find ourselves in. Looking back, our hope is secured in the victory of the resurrection. But the world is still not one of peace.

[13:48] This is not all that we've been promised in Christ, is it? If we're honest, the last few years have rattled much of our sense of security and prosperity, even in a relatively sheltered and protected Australia.

We don't even need to consider world-scale events like pandemics and wars that have ravaged this perceived security in the past couple of years. We feel the consequence of living amongst the weeds every day.

Weeds tend to grow really well. That's one of the things that makes them weeds. And they grow particularly well even when the plants are finding it difficult. Perhaps lockdowns and uncertainty have peeled back the veneer that we paint over our life.

And reality is jarring once it's gone. The effects of the corruption of sin mar each of our relationships. The ultimate expression of this, where we see it most clearly, is in death. We've all felt the deep unnaturalness of that permanent separation that's an inherent part of our lives, isn't it? Indeed, it's the ultimate fate of each of our worldly relationships.

[15 : 06] We're familiar with the pain of things that we wish we said while they were still here. Or other things that we did say that we can now never take back. It hurts terribly.

This is not a peaceful kingdom. Our lives are not a place of rest but of weariness. Is this really the kingdom to come that Jesus was teaching his disciples and the crowds to look forward to, to aspire for?

No. The story doesn't end with the wheat and the weeds intermingled in the field indefinitely. Look at verse 30. At harvest time, I'll tell the reapers, gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to burn them but collect the wheat in my barn.

That's the toned down version that the crowd got. Let's look at verse 41 which is the detailed explanation for the disciples. The Son of Man will send out his angels and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness.

That's the weeds. They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then, the righteous will shine like the sun in their father's kingdom.

[16 : 26] Let anyone who has ears listen. It's a remarkably similar description to that later used by Matthew of Jesus himself in the transfiguration.

Chapter 17, verse 2. He was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. It's an appearance that bears witness to his status and the father's approval.

verse 5. This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. In Christ, we now share this status as co-heirs.

In Christ, we are and will be righteous. That is the punch of this parable. There is more to come. It is a lofty reward and we're to look forward to it while we're in the field. What is to come is our frame of reference, if you will. We can endure the impact of the weeds for now, safe in the confidence that their time is limited.

[17 : 33] They will answer for their actions. More importantly, we will be recognised as who we now are, righteous in Christ and we'll enjoy that righteousness with him.

We know that the weeds endure now only for our own safety, that we would be damaged if they were to be removed. Behind the harshness that we endure in this kingdom that has come now but is still not yet, we know that a deeper love is being expressed by a God who is absolutely righteous and even more offended than we are, but his hand is stayed for our ultimate good.

We will make it to the harvest if we endure it in him. Once a crop is planted, it's on a trajectory to yield a harvest.

It's not a perennial plant that will enjoy the beauty of year after year after year. It's not a fruit tree that will return to for nourishment again and again. A crop is on a single track.

It will grow for a short season. It will produce a yield. It is not pretty it is purposeful. It is terminal. And so we are called to live a life in face of this reality.

[18 : 55] To live in the kingdom now but in anticipation of the fulfilment of this kingdom which is still to come. We're not called to believe in this with a blind faith but we are called to have faith in this truth of the reality that we live in.

Others cannot see it but that doesn't make it less true. And some here this morning are not going to find much comfort here.

Jesus taught on hell frequently and in this parable we again see no apology for its reality. The matter of fact fire in the initial rendition is further expanded as being thrown into a blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

These images piled upon images to describe the horror of the consequence while at the same time assure of the reality and the sufficiency of justice.

It will be realised and it will fit the crime absolutely. There's no room left for the audience to take this current world in our current situation where the weeds grow in the field alongside the wheat as in any way an approval or a dilution of God's holy character.

[20 : 18] In fact the description of the weeds in verse 41 as a causer of sin or a lawbreaker puts an emphasis not just on the consequences of failing to accept Jesus as the Lord and King of this world

and indeed ourselves but the judgement that's stored up as they cause others to sin and tempt the wheat away from their Lord in the field.

John Piper once quipped that in this world only people will last forever. The importance of people and the significance of harming others by tempting them into sin is met with this really sombre warning.

The severity shows up in the severity of the judgement that fits with it. but the severity of this judgement at the same time amplifies love showing to his people not just their hardships of the world will be corrected but he died in their place so that they are righteous and spared from this fate in his name.

If you are here this morning and you're hearing about this without having accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour you really do need to consider why the stakes couldn't be higher in a story about wheat and weeds the division couldn't be greater what grounds do you have to disagree with this truth to turn away from life while it is freely offered to you.

Many have wrestled and earnestly wrestled with how a good God could be comfortable with this messed up world that we live in. Many have stumbled here convinced that the nature of this world means that either God isn't good or he isn't powerful enough to do anything about it so it's not worth following.

[22 : 15] Here we can see that Jesus saw this problem coming this parable is a loving explanation that God is very concerned with the mess of his world and he's very much capable of sorting out that mess but there is a bigger concern in play his love for his people so he puts us above his own righteous prerogative for justice that all who trust in him will not be damaged when those who have rejected him and led others away from his ways are thrown into the fire.

The harvest is coming. Repent and believe the good news while the door remains open to you. Of course many of us here have put our faith in Christ and for us there is great comfort here and now if only we would take it.

there is great hope and security for the weak loved tended by Christ intended for his barn but if we're honest often what we really want is a more immediate satisfaction.

It is a relatively easy choice between the barn and the fire. We clearly want to be in the barn at the end of all things. we accept Jesus as our Lord day to day.

If I were to ask you for three aspirations for your future we'd probably all have fairly similar answers depending on our stage of life. It might be to finish school and move out from home.

[24 : 00] It might be to find a wife or a husband to have kids to buy a comfortable house for our kids to finish school and move out from home. We might want to have a secure job to achieve recognition in our profession in one way or another.

We might want to travel to a particular place or experience a particular event. All are good things blessings from our Lord to be enjoyed and even relished in our freedom in Christ.

All are expressions of who he has made each one of us. But if I asked that simple question how many of us would list to be with Jesus in heaven? If I'm honest I don't think that answer would come to mind in time to make my list of three life ambitions.

I believe it. I hope for it. But it doesn't define the way I see the world and the way it ought to. We miss the hope that is ours in this fallen world when we look to the world to deliver us the satisfaction and peace that will only come to us when we are reunited in Christ.

Our problem is our perspective. Our reality is that in our earthly futures every good thing we enjoy and will enjoy and that we have to look forward to pale when compared to our future home in the kingdom of our Father.

[25 : 27] But we tend to look to bring every little pleasure out of every little thing far more than we look forward in anticipation of reaching our true and intended home. And in doing so every disappointment in this life is felt way more heavily than it is on the scale of reality.

Living our days amongst the weeds is going to be difficult. We should expect constant disappointment. If this is where our hope is, this life, we're always going to be let down. you can see the angels immediate and almost reflex reaction. It's quite telling. They just want to get rid of the weeds straight away to fix the problem now.

But Jesus is explaining to his disciples and to us. He has a better plan, a bigger plan. He uses a parable. We're not privy to all the details, but we do know that he is acting here in love for us.

The darnel plants we talked about earlier grow so closely to the wheat that their roots intermingle. To pull one out is to pull out the wheat. To remove the weeds now is too high a price.
[26 : 46] Living with the weeds is the better option than having them torn out, which would inevitably hurt many of his people. But there is never a moment of uncertainty here. The harvest is coming.

Why do we find it so hard to live as if this were true? Why do we find ourselves forgetting this ultimate good so quickly in our day-to-day lives?

Jesus ends the explanation to the disciples with a familiar refrain, let anyone who has ears listen. Ultimately, our singular main hope, our central joy in life, ought to stem from our status that is now redefined in Christ.

We are wheat and not weeds. Let anyone who has ears listen. But we're really good at forgetting that. We stop listening.

Or rather, we allow ourselves to listen to something else. Every day, there's ads splashed across our phones and TV. They lie to us, selling that true meaning, deep satisfaction, is to be found in a better holiday, a new gadget, or looking a certain way.

[28 : 02] Our non-Christian, and indeed often our Christian friends and family, sell their pursuit of happiness in these things. They slash it across Instagram and Facebook and discuss it around the lunch table at work.

And over time, we let our guard down. We buy into it. Not all at once. Just a little bit here, a little bit of that there. Brothers and sisters, let's be true friends to each other.

Constantly reminding each other, praying for each other, pushing each other into the word, to listen to Christ and remember the truth. This is not our home.

We have something so much greater to look forward to. Moss and rust cannot hurt anything that offers actual satisfaction. More than this, our loving Saviour knows what is our experience.

He allows it only because it is taking us directly down the path to something greater. Don't let each other forget where we are headed. Don't replace that ambition with the desire for lesser things.

[29 : 11] Our hope is our place in the barn, and our place in the barn is locked in, held secure by Christ. It is there that we will enjoy peace and righteousness, forever.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.