

Seed and Weeds

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[0 : 00] It's great to be here this morning as we continue through Matthew. I'm Ben Roberts. As James said before, I'm the guy that looks after the Artizo interns, so you'll often see me in the front here scribbling notes as I listen to them preach.

So now you can scribble notes for me since there's no trainer for me. You'll remember in Matthew that we're in a section where Jesus is teaching parables.

He's teaching to the crowds. And if you remember the passage that we read last week, the structure of this passage is actually very similar, structurally speaking. And so it starts with a big parable, and then there's kind of a little interlude.

In this case, there's two parables and then a quote from Isaiah to explain kind of the purpose of parables. And then there's this explanation to the disciples only at the end. And so this is kind of the second week of that structure, which is interesting.

It's definitely doing something there. But what we'll do this morning is we're going to start with the parable of the weeds, this first story. Talk about its explanation. And then we'll look at the mustard seed and the yeast and ask, what's that about? Why is that here?

[1 : 11] And then we'll talk a little more about what it might mean for us in our situation. So let's look at this first parable. Jesus tells a story of a landowner and his field.

His servants plant the field with good seed, but that night the enemy sneaks in and sows weeds over the wheat. And then as the plants begin to come up, in the next couple of weeks, the servants are dismayed.

It's interesting to look at their kind of order of trying to solve this mystery. First, they blame the seed, the seed that we heard a little bit about last week. They ask, well, was the seed polluted? The master says, no, this is the work of an enemy.

And then the next thing they jump to is, well, we should start weeding immediately, right? No, we'll wait until harvest. We'll sort it out then. The weeds are going to be gathered out and used for fuel, and the weed is going to be harvested and brought into the barn.

Now, when we look at parables, we're always looking for a surprise. We're always looking for the twist. And it's usually that surprise within a parable that's the lever that moves our heart.

[2 : 18] So either that's for encouragement or challenge, depending on where we're coming from. So I think we could ask, what's the surprise in this parable, in the parable of the weeds? Well, it's not that the enemy uses this biological agent to contaminate the master's food supply.

The weed itself is probably a weed called darnel, which is very similar to wheat. And it's interesting, it's very difficult to tell those two plants apart. If you look at them when they're just little seedlings, they look almost identical.

But after they grow to maturity, it's very easy to tell them apart because wheat buries our food, and darnel is black, like the seed is black and it's actually poisonous. You'll die if you eat it.

One commentator calls this seed bioterrorism, which I liked. And it seems perhaps like this is unlikely, like who would do something like this? And yet there's actually a Roman law that forbids this very practice of sowing darnel among wheat.

So it seems that Jesus hasn't invented this. He's just taken this situation that people might have heard of before and he's adopted it for his teaching. So the surprise is not that the enemy is trying to harm the crop or the master's food supply.

[3 : 32] In fact, that's kind of expected. The surprise is that the master tells the workers not to pull up the weeds immediately. If you're a gardener, you know that weeding is essential for a good crop.

At best, the weeds steal water and they steal nutrients. They steal light from your crop. They hurt the yield. And at worst, the weeds can actually kill a plant. And we heard about the thorns last week

choking out the good seed, right?

But the master seems unconcerned about these risks. Leave it, he says, lest you damage the wheat in the process of pulling out the weeds. Once the master will not risk the wheat to clear out the weeds, that sorting will happen later.

And so as we find out, when we look a few verses down at Jesus' interpretation in verse 36, some of this seems obvious to us, right? It's Jesus who sows the good seed over the field.

The field is actually the world. The word is the wheat that springs into life, the sons of the kingdom, Jesus' disciples. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, Satan, those opposed to Jesus.

[4 : 42] And the harvest, of course, this is usually the way it's used in Matthew, is the end of the age, the judgment of all things. And the descriptions there, we'll get into this more in a bit, but those are very interesting.

God's people shine, and the weeds are harvested for kindling. So, there's going to be this final great separation between the crowds or Jesus' opponents and disciples.

And it occurs not now while the plants are growing up together, but later. That's very interesting. There's a number of things to say about this, I think.

The first is that it's quite hopeful, which maybe is surprising to you. But there's a real sense here, I think, of God's kindness and patience.

It's possible, perhaps not agriculturally, but in the kingdom of God, it's possible for a weed to mature into wheat. And we learn in 2 Peter that the reason God doesn't come in and sort everything out now is that he's patient.

[5 : 54] He's waiting. He's wanting to give people time to repent. And so, I think there's certainly a warning here in this parable that's saying, there's going to be a reckoning.

And this is the situation on the ground. And what are you? Are you a weed or are you a wheat? Judgment is coming. God is patient, but you need to turn. That's the first thing that's really interesting.

The second thing is that the setting is the world. Did you notice that? I think it's in verse 36 there.

That this is in the world. A lot of people have spoken of this parable as being the church.

It's kind of mixed nature of good and bad. I think it's talking about the world. So, the field is not St. John's. But it's Vancouver. It's Canada. And the reason that this is amazing and surprising is that in verse 41, we find out that this field, the world, is going to become God's kingdom.

Did you see that? I think in our minds, we always think, and I think this is kind of some sort of escapism that we might have. We always assume that the wheat is harvested out of the world.

[7 : 06] Right? It's like the idea of rapture. But here in this parable, the weeds are gathered out of the world. And the world is transformed into God's kingdom.

And the wheat, the suns, remain and shine. I mean, there's this image of transformation. This is an image of the new heavens and the new earth, right? All things being remade.

Now, I think what's perhaps so striking about that, that idea of transformation and this vision of the end of all things, is how contrary it seems to what we see on the ground.

So you and I, we dwell in this field, and we worry in just the way that the workers do, I think. But we look into the field and we say, surely the enemy has ruined the crop.

Surely the weeds are overtaking the weed. Surely we are going to be choked out if we don't act right now. Now, this is especially true as the church in Canada realizes that we are a tiny minority.

[8 : 10] And as a church that's passionate about being centered around the gospel, we're a tiny minority within a minority. So what does this parable have to say to us then?

Well, we know that Jesus and God the Father are going to render judgment, and that for now, they allow this situation to continue. So we're not the ones that are actually in charge of judgment as much as we feel like we are at times.

God has judgment in his hands, and he's allowed this situation to persist. And he's not frightened for the crop. We believe the crop has to be overtaken, but Jesus tells us otherwise.

The sons of the kingdom can survive and thrive in even the most unlikely of places. They will produce a harvest, weeds or not.

And when we look at the field, we might not share Jesus' patience. Often the church has reacted by becoming isolationists, right? We try to do the weeding ourselves. We try to transplant all of those wheat plants out of the field and put them into a little garden where they'll be protected.

[9 : 19] Imagine ourselves to hasten God's kingdom by doing the sorting for him. Conversely, we become quite alarmist. The sky is falling. The world has never been more scary.

The youth have never been under more pressure. The politicians have never been more corrupt. The faithful have never been such a small minority. And on, we wring our hands, right? And I think it's that very situation that the disciples will face, undoubtedly, Jesus knows, that he speaks these other two tiny parables in verses 31 and 33.

I'll just read it out for you. He put another parable before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

It is the smallest of all seeds. But when it is grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree. So that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. He told them another parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. Till it was all leavened. Now, do you see the connection here to how this will address our fears?

[10 : 29] Jesus' kingdom is like the smallest of all seeds known in that day, the mustard seed. The least likely, it would seem, by looking at it, to become this large shrub in a garden patch taking over all the other plants.

Even like a tree. Big enough within your little vegetable patch that birds can actually nest in it.

Jesus' kingship is like leaven. It's just taking a small piece of dough from the last batch you made and mixing it into your new batch.

It's invisible. It's intangible. It's something that we don't control. It's a tiny minority mixed into a huge majority. And yet, as it is mixed together, into this three measures, enough to make bread with, it leavens it all.

Slowly transforming it, right? Into dough. It's going to become bread for many. And so the kingdom, this promise of transformation, this promise of shining, of becoming like Jesus, of living in a place where there is no sin and suffering, that can seem like such a small and vulnerable dream to us. It can seem so unlikely. And yet, this kingdom promise works its way through the entire loaf of space and time to us here and now.

[11 : 51] It works even now in Vancouver until the field of the world will become the kingdom of God in its fullness. So the encouragement today is this. Don't be discouraged by appearances.

Jesus knows the field that we're in. He knows that the word of the kingdom is more powerful yet. He knows that his wheat will bear fruit until the kingdom comes in fullness. And the warning is this.

Judgment is coming. It is the Lord's. It's delayed until the harvest. And the weeds are not pulled up yet. And so there's still time for weed to become a weed.

As Jesus says, He who has ears, let him hear. Amen.