

Matthew 13:24-30 *He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,<sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.<sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.<sup>27</sup> 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?'<sup>28</sup> 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?'<sup>29</sup> But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.<sup>30</sup> 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, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' ' "*

## Your Kingdom Come – The Weeds, Matthew 13:24-30

As central as the Kingdom was to Jesus's ministry, it is quite strange how many of us can describe the gospel of Jesus without once mentioning his most central theme. Because of a lack of understanding of the Kingdom we don't understand what our purpose is as a church. When we don't see what we're looking forward too, what we're seeking first, then we can't see how we ought to arrive there. The Kingdom is deeply mysterious, it is both a present reality and a future expectation, and as we will see it can be compared to a lot of different things. As we explore Jesus's teachings on the Kingdom, we will see this incredible purpose of Jesus working through his church to see his Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

Our last sermon in this series covered the parable of the sower, a picture of Jesus's word being spread throughout the world and causing all sorts of different results. Most of which bear no fruit, but also revealing a good soil that bears a miraculous yield. We saw that the parable itself is an explanation of why Jesus speaks in parables, it is so that the word might connect with and reveal the one's God has chosen to share in his Kingdom. There is an organic connection between our understanding of his word and our bearing fruit and sharing in his Kingdom.

This week we see, Jesus present another parable to the crowd, which he later explains to his disciples in private. And once again the parable is agricultural, about sowing seed in a field. This time however the metaphors switch, the reception of the soils is different, and what the seeds represent is different from the previous parable of the sower. Jesus's parables are not overlapping series of stories, it is not as though soil always means hearts, or seed always means the word of God, but rather the point of the parable is the narrative arc that they create, and the principles the arc establishes. It is perhaps because this parable uses the same images, seeds, field, sower, that the disciples request a further explanation, as they correctly sense these same symbols are representing different realities.

While the parable of the four soils demonstrates that there is a differing reception to the sharing of the Kingdom, the parable of the weeds switches to the question of how these differing soils relate to each other. How do the hearts of those that receive the kingdom and those that reject it relate to each other both in the present and the future.

This morning we are going to look at the explanation of the parable that Jesus provides to his disciples, and see how Jesus sets a present expectation for the Kingdom and a future hope.

## 1. Understanding the Parable

*Matthew 13:29-30 But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> 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, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' ' "*

The parable is of a man who sows good seed in his field, and is then targeted by an enemy who sows bad seed in his field. The likely culprit is the seed of a plant called darnel, which presents almost exactly as wheat does, until the ear is formed in the wheat. The servants, recognizing the infestation, come to their master and ask if they ought to gather the weeds out of the field, to provide space for the wheat. The instruction of the landowner to his servants is the most critical part of the parable. He instructs them to not to gather the weeds, because they will likely root up the wheat along with the weeds. For now, let the weeds and wheat grow together, and then at the harvest, when their difference is clear, they can be separated and put to their particular uses. The weeds to be burned and the wheat to be gathered into the barn. As in the parable of the sower, Jesus explains the imagery to his disciples by laying out the realities that the symbols in the parable represent.

*Matthew 13:36-39 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." <sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.*

Jesus in his explanation corresponds nearly every detail in the story to a literal object. Put simply the outcome is the fact that the sons of the kingdom will co-exist with the sons of the evil one, both growing next to each other in the world, and not to be finally separated until the end of the age. God allows the growth of both, until the judgement day when he separates the sons of the kingdom from the sons of the evil one, that his kingdom alone may be made manifest in the world.

This parable, although lesser known than that of the four soils, provides us with some of the most practical instruction we could receive. In this Jesus sets our expectations of the present expression of the kingdom, and engages our hope for the future hope of the kingdom.

## 2. Present Expectation

*Matthew 13:27-28 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?' 28 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?'*

In Jesus's parable recorded immediately prior to this one, the Parable of the sower, he makes clear that there are two possible outcomes for a human soul, or two conditions of a human heart. Bearing fruit and not bearing fruit. In this parable the same distinction is made in terms of being sons of the Kingdom or Sons of the evil one. That however is not the point of this parable in the same way. The question rather moves on from understanding that reality to considering what we ought to do with it. And it is the question of the servants to their master and their master's response that shows us how to live.

The servants ask if the master wants them to go ahead and gather up the weeds. This question I think represents the typical response, and underlies a warranted fear with regards to dividing up humanity. There is a human impulse to be the ones who do the dividing. So that the world might be made immediately pure, by a simple removing of those people who are making it impure. I don't need to provide you with a history lesson in how dangerous this can be. Christianity indulged the temptation to remove the impure from amongst us many times throughout its history, each time causing incredible harm. From atrocities like the Spanish inquisition, or even the violent aftermath of the reformation, but this also manifests in less immediately atrocious ways.

Consider the monastic movement. Across Europe, this desire to be the ones who do the separating from the pure and the impure, the wheat and the weeds, caused a physical separation of the truly pure from the rest of society as they cloistered themselves into monasteries. And the remnants of this tendency remain today although not in monasteries but in Christian seclusion. At the end of my senior year at CU I had realized that all the non-Christian friends I started school with I had become almost completely removed from. As my faith grew I separated from them, until I realized I had basically no contact with the outside world, and in light of this my faith became insular, and quite frankly frustrating, because I had taken it upon myself to do the separating.

This tendency of course isn't unique to Christianity but is typical of the way movements have acted in the world. If the problem of the Kingdom is the impure amongst us, then they must be removed. The master's response therefore is critical to understand, as Christianity's teaching is incredibly unique.

*Matthew 13:29 But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.'*

Here is the reason that the servants are not equipped to pull up the weeds from amongst the wheat, and it is that they can't tell the difference. So if they attempt to remove just the weeds they will almost certainly end up removing the wheat as well. This perfectly aligns with the agricultural conceit of the parable, in that Darnel appears just as wheat until the ear appears, but What does this then mean for our understanding of the kingdom of heaven? I think it tells us three things.

First, the sons of the kingdom in their present state, are not able to be obviously distinguished from the sons of the evil one. What metrics could we possibly use from the outside looking in? Confession that Jesus is Lord? This almost certainly seems like too low of a bar, and too easily manipulated. What about performing a miracle? This seems almost certainly too high of a bar, and yet Jesus warns that perhaps this is too low of a bar, as he states that many will confess that they have performed miracles in Jesus name and yet he will say to them, depart from me for I never knew you. So first of all, you aren't equipped to tell the difference.

Second, consider that in this process it is not that we might get it wrong and accidentally leave some weeds, but the danger is rather that the wheat might be uprooted. We are to *not* do this sorting now, for the sake of the wheat. Church history has brought this to bear, when we take the sorting into our own

hands in this present age of the church, it is the church herself, that which is supposed to be the bearer of the news of the kingdom, which gets corrupted. These two reasons are connected, when we consider that we can make this separation now, between the weeds and the wheat, then that must mean we have established some metric by which we can judge the condition of one's faith. And as we have seen earlier, there simply is no test that we can run someone through to detect that they have been transformed by the gospel. When we think we have discovered that metric then we create cult like institutions of enforcement around them. Dress codes, linguistic norms, musical styles, events that people have attended, or not attended. Christianity then becomes an expression of mechanical conformity rather than organic transformation. In this case, the wheat is threatened because we'll likely pluck up that which should remain because our metrics are wrong. JC Ryle captures this point, stating.

Those who care not what happens to the wheat, provided they can root up the tares, show little of the mind of Christ. And after all there is deep truth in the charitable saying of Augustine, "Those who are tares today, may be wheat tomorrow."<sup>1</sup>

This shows us finally just how helpful this present expectation of the Kingdom's growth is. The kingdom is always moving forward, in the midst of disagreement, and adversity and individuals right there in the midst of it that are directly opposed to it. Some of you have bounced around from one church to another, because you haven't understood this. You are looking for the church that finally doesn't have any weeds in it, so it's just a matter of time before you leave this one as well. Understanding the wheat and the weeds provides us with an incredible patience in our dealings with each other, because we know that this apparent weed we are dealing with may in fact be wheat, and it is not ours to tell.

A church that understands this, does not remain cloistered back away from the world debating petty issues like what movies we can see, or what words we can use. Instead a church that gets this moves boldly into the community, invites all sorts of apparent weeds into our spaces, and perseveres amidst incredible hardship and slander, even from amongst our friends in our own churches, because we know that is the way Jesus explained that the kingdom would presently be. Always in this bizarre mixture in the world, of wheat and weeds, and it is up to him to tell the difference. Not us. Our hope or our fear is that one day he will.

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, J. C. (1860). *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (p. 147). New York: Robert Carter & Brothers.

### 3. Future Hope

*Matthew 13:41-43 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,<sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

Once again we are presented with two outcomes, and the difference between the two is as extreme as the similarity is between the wheat and the weeds. At the end of this present age, Jesus will send his angels to gather out of his kingdom both the causes of lawlessness and those who break the law, and they will be thrown into the fiery furnace away from the presence of his kingdom. It is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth in regret that the kingdom could have been in their midst the whole time and yet gone unrecognized.

The righteous however, and this is the hope of the Christian, although they may appear not much different now, struggling in terror against sin, and tired and weary, enduring incredible hardship, will one day shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

The kingdom of heaven now, in its present state has broken into the world, but it does not spread by the removal of other kingdoms, but by growing the field. Understanding our present ignorance in terms of sorting the kingdom, means we are called to the complicated place of seeking the good of all for the sake of the elect. And we rest easily knowing that the sorting belongs to the only one qualified to make the distinction. The kingdom of heaven is already here, and yet it is not yet fully known. Perhaps the person you have written off, may one day shine like the sun.

