

Pondering the Parables V: The Wheat and the Tares

Sermon.

Good Morning/Afternoon! There is a note page in your bulletin so you can follow along with today's message; if you didn't get one and would like one, please raise your hand and one of our men will bring you one.

I read a story recently about a couple whose daughter became involved with a young man that they felt had some real character flaws. They at first encouraged her to not have anything to do with him and as the relationship went on, the encouragement turned to pretty serious pressure. They could see things their daughter couldn't, or wouldn't...see.

Despite their tears, prayers and pleading, the girl just fell in love with the boy and married him. The unfortunate thing is that the parents were right. The boy did have some serious character flaws and, a few years and a couple babies later, he abandoned her.

The pain that these parents went through was intense, to say nothing of the daughter's young family. And as if things needed to be made worse, the parents were on the church staff, and everybody knows that if you're an Elder or a staff member, you're supposed to have all your family together and everything is supposed to be right. And so now there's guilt stacked on top of the grief.

I've never had to live through that experience with one of my kids, but I'll bet more than one of the people in this room can relate.

When I hear stories like that, I'd give anything if I could be God for a day. Wouldn't you? You know what I would do? I would go to those parents and I'd say, "Listen, I know you've cried and your hearts have been broken over this. But tell you what... I am God for a day and I have the power to reverse the whole situation. I can make it as though it never happened.

I can make it so that your daughter will never meet or marry that boy. He will never abandon her. She will never have to feel the pain that he caused her, and you will be saved all those years of heartache, and tears, and shame, and the disgrace that you feel has come on you. Would you like for me to do that?

Before you give me your answer...full disclosure here... if I reverse the whole process and make it so that you never go through this thing, you do

understand of course, that those two grandbabies won't ever have come into existence.”

Put yourself in that position...would you do it?

Open your Bibles this morning to the book of Matthew, chapter 13, and work your way down to verses 24 through 30. We've been working our way through some of the parables of Jesus...this is the fifth and final week of the series, but the parables are certainly something that we will re-visit soon...it's been good to take a closer look at them.

You know this one as the story of the Wheat and the Tares...or...as the Christian Standard Bible interprets it...the Wheat and the Weeds. Jesus tells this parable right after the parable of the Sower, which is what Pastor John tackled in week 1 of the series.

Also in week 1, Jesus explains to his disciples the purpose of using parables to explain the Kingdom of heaven.

The Disciples were constantly asking questions about God's Kingdom. "What is the kingdom of heaven?" "Where is it found?" "Who will get into it, and who won't?" And "When will it begin—or, has it already begun?" Believers in every generation from Jesus's time to today have asked those questions, and we're still asking them.

The parables are seemingly a series of simple and memorable stories, but although they appear simple, the messages they convey are deep, and central to the teachings of Jesus — especially his teachings about the Kingdom of God.

We call those particular stories the Kingdom Parables, because Jesus begins each by saying: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...", or "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to..." which is what we see at the beginning of our passage today...look at verse 24:

²⁴He presented another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. ²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷The landowner's servants came to him and said, 'Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?'

²⁸“An enemy did this,’ he told them.

“So, do you want us to go and pull them up?’ the servants asked him.

²⁹“No,’ he said. ‘When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. 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.’”

A couple of weeks ago I told you that the word parable comes from a combination of two Greek words that literally translated means “something that is thrown beside something else to tell you something about it.”

And I told you that parables can be comparisons, or they can be contrasts. In the case of the parable of the Persistent Widow, we were dealing with a parable of contrast, but this one...is a parable of comparison, as are all the Kingdom parables...Jesus is trying to relay an understanding of a deep spiritual concept using a story.

So what is it that Jesus is trying to bring to light in this story? Well, most of the parables don’t get the benefit of an explanation, but this one does! Slide down a few verses to 36 - 43; let’s read that:

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷He replied: “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world; and the good seed — these are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness.

⁴²They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Let anyone who has ears listen.

You might be wondering...why is this such a big deal? So there are weeds in the wheat field! If you’ve ever done any kind of agricultural work in your life,

right down to planting a food or flower patch, you just kind of assume that weeds are part of the deal, don't you?

In the same way as he does in not just the parables, but in many of the references that he uses, Jesus is once again using farming as an illustration because it was a concept that was very familiar to the people of that time.

In Jesus' day, sowing weeds in a neighbor's field was a common way folks had of getting even with each other. Instead of spray painting graffiti on the wall of the house or loosening up the lug nuts on the neighbor's chariot, they'd sow tares in the neighbor's wheat or barley. It had become such a common practice that the Roman government actually passed a law against it.

The particular seed that produced the "tare" referenced in this parable is a weed called "bearded darnel." It's a variety of rye grass and, in its early stages of growth, is indistinguishable from wheat. You can't tell them apart.

So if you had planted a wheat crop, you wouldn't know there was darnel growing in your field until the stalks started to produce, and then it was too late. By that time the roots would be so interwoven that if you tried to pull up the weeds...you'd pull up the wheat right along with it. It would be unavoidable.

OK, so there's weeds in there you don't want to pull up...get it. Still don't see how this is a big catastrophe.

As a boy I used to walk the fields or even the garden with my Grandpa, and it was common to see him bend down to the base of a corn stalk and slice off the shoots that were growing out of the side. He called them "suckers". And kinda like a disciple, for the longest time I just thought he didn't like his corn to be all raggedy-lookin'.

It wasn't until some time later that he explained that he cut those shoots off because they were sucking the energy out of the corn. A corn stalk is only so efficient at producing energy, and that energy was best used making plump ears of corn instead of growing stalks that wouldn't bear fruit.

It's the same reason our own Gene Moe spends so much time every year pruning our lilac bushes out front...those branches that aren't going to make flowers get cut away.

In the case of the wheat fields, the weeds are growing alongside the new wheat, using the same water, the same sunshine, the same ground to provide them with what they need to grow...just like the wheat. But...the weeds will never bear fruit. And that means the wheat won't ever develop to its full potential, because it is losing the food it needs to the surrounding danel.

If the wheat doesn't fully develop, the yield at harvest will be lower. Now...the costs to the owner won't change, the field still needs to be tended, the number of harvesters will be the same...in fact, they'll probably put in more hours than normal because now the weeds have to be separated from the grain.

A lower yield could really have a heavy cost to the owner. Now we understand a little better why sowing tares over good seed was such a terrible act that the Romans had to make it illegal...by doing that, you were de-valuing the harvest.

Man, there's a lot of stuff in there that we could dig out and explore, and we're not going to get to all of it. Let me focus on just a couple areas here.

First, let's understand who everyone is in this parable. Back up to verse 37: *"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world; and the good seed — these are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.*

That's pretty straightforward, isn't it? Jesus sows...the good seed, who are his children...into the world, and Satan comes behind him to scatter his own children into the mix. Now there are some things we need to recognize here, first...Jesus is the Master. Jesus is the Owner.

The devil, as much as he delights in making a mess out of things, is relegated to skulking around in the darkness while the laborers are sleeping to do what he does. (There's a whole 'nother sermon in there about keeping a watch out instead of sleeping.)

When the enemy comes, what is he able to do? Is he able to go into the field and pluck up all the good seed that the owner has sown? Nope. Is he able to change the characteristics of the seed? That is, can he take a good seed and turn it to a bad seed? No. He can't ever change what that seed is going to be. A kernel of wheat is going to produce wheat...every time.

So what is left for the enemy to do? Let's look at this concept of de-valuation. All he can do is to try to de-value the harvest by throwing weed seeds into the field, where the weeds will do what weeds do... aggressively grow and steal away the nutrition and water and sunlight from the wheat so that the heads of grain never get the full benefit of the field, and they grow, but aren't robust and full.

Maybe he even gets lucky and as the workers see the weeds emerging they immediately set about yanking them all out, and in the process destroy the wheat as well.

Once sin entered the world, man began to live in a field where suddenly weeds began to appear. In Genesis 3:17-18 God told Adam: ...*"Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*

In essence God says: "Because you disobeyed me, you have let sin into my creation". From that point on, the children of the devil lived alongside the children of God. Some people ask why that is. They ask why God allows the wicked to live. Why God allows bad things to happen. Why can't evil just be removed from the world?

The answer to all those things is right here in our parable today; verse 26:
²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared.
²⁷The landowner's servants came to him and said, 'Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?'

²⁸"An enemy did this,' he told them.

"So, do you want us to go and pull them up?' the servants asked him.

²⁹"No,' he said. 'When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them.

We saw earlier that darnel is a type of rye grass, which has an abundant root system. It spreads wide and runs deep. So, by the time the wheat stalks begin to develop fruit, the darnel is so integral to the wheat that it's not coming out without taking the wheat with it.

Once sin entered God's perfect creation, it was immediately woven into the fabric of our hearts. I spoke a couple weeks ago about the destruction of mankind in the flood...even the complete annihilation of the sinful failed to do one thing...separate sin from the heart of man.

Just as the good and the evil live side by side in the world, sin is woven into the fabric of even the hearts of those of us that love Christ. There's an encouragement to be found here, though. It's a familiar encouragement, I'm sure...found in Romans 8:28: *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

Like a lot of people, I fell in love in high school, and was just bound and determined to marry this girl. I graduated a year before her, so here I was fresh out of high school and not much ambition...working at a pizza joint. Shortly after we got engaged, my prospective mother-in-law sat me down and told me that a pizza dude wasn't going to give her little girl the life she deserved, so I'd better come up with a more suitable plan.

I joined the Air Force...for a girl. Not where I thought life was headed. I traded away my first assignment (which was to Germany) to spend 3 and a half years in the middle of the New Mexico desert because she didn't want to live outside the country.

When I got hit with an assignment to Panama, I found out that since she couldn't go with me, in exchange, I would have a voice in my return assignment. For some reason, she wanted to go anywhere on the East Coast. Again, not my thing, but I got assigned to South Carolina...for a girl.

Wouldn't you know it, 4 months into that Panama hitch...she called me up and told me she wanted a divorce. Now I'm stuck with a South Carolina assignment I don't want.

The bright spot was that I was going to finally work with fighter jets. That New Mexico assignment put me into a mobility unit with lots of tents and sewing machines, but no jets. Right before I left Panama for my new job in South Carolina, I found out that they had found out...that I had mobility experience and they switched me to a tiny little mobility squadron with...you guessed it...a lot of tents and sewing machines, but no jets.

To top it all off, since I was now not working with jets, I wasn't allowed to live with the guys that did, and got moved into a dormitory with Operations

people. Maintenance guys like me do not get along well with Operations people. Life's starting to suck a little.

But here's where the story changes. Sally...was an Operations people. She lived on the floor below me and I walked by her almost every day while she was on the hallway phone (she made a lot of calls).

We started going out, and even after I was stupid enough to insist, in no uncertain terms, that there was no way I was ever getting married again, she continued going out with me and 27 years later, I'm still eating those words.

You think God isn't working a plan in your life? Romans 8:28 is not just an encouragement, but a promise to his children, and I submit to you that Jesus is Lord and is directing your path even if you aren't his child today. Because I certainly wasn't a disciple of Christ back then, and yet his hand is evident in everything that I have gone through...in good times...and in hard times.

Remember that question I asked you earlier? If you placed yourself in the position of that couple that could have had all that evil removed from them, but had to surrender their grandchildren as part of the bargain...would you do it? I know a few grandparents, and I would bet that they would endure all that and more to hold onto the blessing of those grandbabies!

No matter what inconveniences, disappointments and pain I experienced in the mistakes that I made as a young man, I would do it all again to not have to surrender the blessings of my wife and my children that God had planned for me.

I've thought through it again and again; if I hadn't been married to that girl for that precise amount of time...if she hadn't been there to influence my choice of assignments, I would have missed all this. The roots of good and evil in this world are inseparably entwined, but if you let God work his plan...Romans 8:28 becomes very real for you.

There have been entire seasons in my life, and I know in yours as well, that Satan has worked hard to do anything he can do...to de-value the harvest that God has planted.

But that's all Satan can hope for...that the harvest is worth less because of the influence of the weeds. If you are a disciple of Christ in this room today, you need to know that you are the good seed that has been planted by the Master into the world. And the enemy can plant tares around you and try to choke you

out and stunt your growth...but you are still...wheat! And you will always be...wheat!

That should excite you! If you're a Child of God, that should excite you! Here we sit...planted in this field that has become overrun with tares. Everywhere we turn we see tares. Sometimes the tares are so thick you feel like you can't even see another wheat stalk...but even though you rub shoulders all day with tares...you just keep being...wheat.

Maybe you're not excited because you're not wheat. I've got good news for you...the devil can't make wheat into weeds, but God, the creator of all things, the Master of the field... can...make wheat out of weeds.

Everyone in this world, everyone in this room was born a weed, and at some point, God re-made them...changed their DNA...and made them wheat.

And I don't know about you, but that's why I tear up when we sing praise in this church...I will praise God forever for pursuing me...and for changing my DNA.

After Sally and I were blessed with our children, it became important to her to get into a church. I went...mostly because, well, she's cute, but terrifying when you're on her bad side. Love you honey!

Like any church, they needed volunteers for certain functions, and I kind of fell right into doing things to help out. It wasn't long before people in the church started talking about what a great guy ol' Grant was. Such a great servant of God.

And it wasn't long after that that I began to believe my own press. For anyone that isn't familiar with that term, it means to start thinking that what other people think about your importance or virtue...is actually true.

Guys...when this parable starts talking about tares, it's not always just the evil that we're surrounded with. Sometimes, it's the people that are doing all the right things for all the wrong reasons. The people that think that as long as I come to church and maybe volunteer a few times a year...God gives me points for that. Those people are tares.

They're imitation Christians...they look just like the real thing and even the most discerning among us can't tell the difference between the tare and the wheat. But God sees into the heart. HE knows.

There are some great people in this world that give money and time to worthy causes, protect the weak, defend morality, but even they...in the absence of a relationship with Jesus Christ...are tares.

Let's read again the last part of Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds...verses 39 - 43: *...The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.*

⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness.

⁴²They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Let anyone who has ears listen.

You read that a lot in the parables as well: *Let anyone who has ears listen.* Jesus is very clear in his words to the disciples. Listen...the harvest is coming. Judgement...is coming.

In the first message of this series, Pastor John made the point using the Parable of the Sower that Jesus wants us to develop a deep relationship with him. Surface knowledge of who he is...is worthless. Jesus is after your heart. He's planted good seed in you and is patiently waiting for it to spring up on the fertile soil of your heart and help you to care for it and bring a fruitful harvest from it.

Pastor Erik encouraged us to lay our hopes for salvation in the arms of the perfect Good Samaritan, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who alone is able to redeem us. Our works, our accomplishments, our church attendance...isn't enough to keep us from perishing along the road of life.

The Persistent Widow cried out for justice and got it from an unbelieving and ungodly man. Jesus used that story to contrast our human judges with The Judge...the God who stands ready to give us justice in the last day. But God's justice is far different from ours. His justice is based on that all-important question that we have to know God will be asking us on that day...

The question that Pastor John asked last week as he walked us through the Parable of the Talents... “What did you do with the most valuable thing I gave you? What did you do with Jesus?” Is Jesus really Lord of your life? Or is just something you feel good saying?

If you haven't truly surrendered to Jesus, I can't let you out of here without telling you again...that the harvest is coming. Whether you pass from this life without having that relationship with Jesus, or you're alive when He comes to gather the harvest, you need to know that only he can turn you from a weed into wheat. And when he comes, the weeds will be bundled and burned...only the wheat will be gathered to be taken home.

If you don't know Jesus as Lord...if you aren't submitting to his Lordship...today is the day to make a change. All through the parables we hear the warnings. The Kingdom of God is coming. Will you be ready? Do you know in whom your salvation lies? You can fool people...even yourself...into thinking you're wheat, but if you really have the DNA of a weed...the Master knows.

Let anyone who has ears listen.

Let's pray.