

The Sort

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like... Discovering the Mysteries of Kingdom Life

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

May 1, 2016

Well, thank you again for being in worship today.

For the last 4 weeks, our message series has been “The Kingdom of Heaven is Like... Discovering the Mysteries of Kingdom Life.” We have discovered from Matthew 13 some very interesting things about living as kingdom citizens:

- We learned from the Parable of the Sower and the Seed first that the kingdom of heaven is for everyone. The Gospel is to go everywhere. The message of Jesus is meant for everyone. No one is not welcome in the kingdom of God, no one is not welcome in the church, despite what we think sometimes.
- Secondly, we learned that it is up to you to cultivate the soil of your soul if you are to be the seed that produces 30, 60 or 100 fold.
- Then we studied the Parable of the Mustard Seed and Leaven, and we learned that the Kingdom of Heaven starts from the smallest beginnings, but no one knows where it will end.
- Last week, we learned it is worth any sacrifice to enter the Kingdom; that we must be willing to give everything they have – our hearts, our desires, our minds, our attitudes, our control, our selfishness, our will, our lives – to God in complete submission, because the Kingdom is worth it. That’s exactly what God was willing to do to redeem us, because we are the pearl of great price. God gave everything for you.

Today, we are going to look at one final parable in Matthew 13. So turn to Matthew 13 in your Bible.

Matthew 13:24-30

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”¹

Skip down to verses 36-43:

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached 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 are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers

¹ Matthew 13:24-30 (NRSV)

*are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!*²

Now, a lot of folks, when they look at this parable, think it's just a rehashing of what Jesus said about the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, where you get that wonderful exchange, "Lord, when did we see you sick and visit you, naked and clothe you, in prison and visit you?" And Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."³

We could conclude that in today's passage in Matthew 13 that Jesus is talking about how, at the judgement, He is going to separate the good from the bad. But there's something else I want us to see in this parable, because what Jesus is proposing is really radical.

Most farmers, in fact, would sooner plow under a bad crop and start over, than try to separate the seed at harvest. It certainly is a lot easier! But Jesus' concern is that NONE of the good harvest be lost. And that is where we begin to understand the story.

In my own life, I have had a lot of difficulty trying to decide who are the sheep and who are the goats – who is good seed and who is a weed. Sometimes I feel more like a goat or a weed myself than a sheep or fruitful wheat. It's too easy to separate humanity into two groups – them and us; the good and the bad.

In reality, life is not like that. Most of us are both good and bad – weeds and wheat. And, in light of the gospel, we have to reject that way of looking at people. People are like a field into which both good and bad seed have been sown, or to put it another way – we don't know what wheat has been sown in the most weed-filled garden.

That is where we begin today. Jesus' concern is not to separate the wheat from the weeds, but rather than none of the wheat be lost.

This parable reveals to us three things: First of all, it reveals to us God's sovereignty. God is sovereign. There is no dualism in Christianity. God rules. Many people don't really understand that. Many think that God has given this world over to Satan's control. They have the mistaken notion that Satan, not God, is at the helm of history.

Do you know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada? She was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the youngest of four daughters. As a teenager, she enjoyed riding horses, hiking, tennis, and swimming. When she was a few months shy of her 18th birthday, she dove into Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water. She suffered a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical levels and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down. During her two years of rehabilitation, she experienced anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, and religious doubts. She has shared, very candidly, some of her experiences as the result of her accident. She said that, as she lay in her hospital bed, she often pictured God and Satan waging war in her body for control. And she was unsure who was winning. She kept feeling, "I have to be strong. I can't let Satan get the best of me. I can't let him beat me in this and steal my

² Matthew 13:36-43 (NRSV)

³ Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

salvation.” She felt God was a reactor – Satan had destroyed God’s “plan A” for her life; now He had to figure out a “Plan B” for her life. It wasn’t really what he wanted for her, but since Satan goofed up what He really wanted, He’d have to make the most of it, and see what He could salvage out of the situation.

But this parable shows us something else – God is the initiator. He is the One who does the sowing. Satan may sow weeds in God’s plan, but God’s plan is fulfilled perfectly anyway. Satan is no more than a tool that God uses to complete his purposes. God was – and is – in control. Always. He has no “Plan B” for us.

Yet it is hard for us to tune into that will, isn’t it? We are like the servants in the parable, in danger of tearing out wheat with the weeds. God works in our life, but we aren’t sure what He is doing, where He is leading us, or how we should respond. Like Job, we begin to question him – as Joni was tempted to do.

The problem is not God, of course – the problem is our sinful condition. The problem is not with what God is doing – the problem is that we can’t tell weeds from wheat; we do not know or follow God’s will. Our condition of brokenness, of separation from the heart of God, causes our hearts and wills to be blinded and darkened.

Only One knows the Father’s heart - and that is God’s own Spirit. Isaiah says, speaking for God:

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”⁴

Paul writes in Romans 8:

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for.⁵

We struggle to know how to carry on a relationship with God. In the first seven chapters of Romans, Paul explains why this is so: we are caught up in a web, a whirlpool, a downward spiral of suffering, frustration and futility that revolves around our own sinful nature. All that we do is tainted.

So how can we ever hope to dialogue with, to touch the heart of God, or to understand His ways? Everything appears to us to be shades of gray:

- That couple caught up in the prospect of divorce, not knowing whether to pray for the strength to stick it out, even when they seem so very incompatible in their very natures.
- The son and daughter, watching their mother slowly waste away to the point that she is almost unrecognizable to them as the person they once knew – not sure whether to pray for death or life for her.
- The woman, with a burden of the Gospel on her heart, not sure whether to pray for boldness in declaring her faith to her friend, or patience, so that her friend may not be offended and perhaps, instead, be eventually won by the testimony of her life.

The weeds and wheat are mixed together in life, to the point that they are indecipherable, unrecognizable to us. We do not know how to pray as we ought. We don’t know what to pray for. We can’t make it through the tangle of weeds and wheat.

⁴ Isaiah 55:8-9 (NLT)

⁵ Romans 8:26a-b (NLT)

Yet Paul goes on to say:

*But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*⁶

God takes the burden upon himself. In the parable, Jesus says the farmer himself will separate wheat from weeds at the harvest. He takes responsibility. He takes charge. While we sigh, not knowing what to say to God, not knowing how to respond, God's own Spirit, the precious gift He gave to you at your conversion, discerns your greatest needs and desires, and envelopes them in God's will, and presents them to the throne of God.

In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul says that Jesus emptied himself, taking on human form and, being found in human form, humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant, dying on the cross for us. He entered into our life. He died in our place, so that we might have life. Now the Spirit continues this work on an even deeper level, entering into the midst of our hearts, into our day to day pleasures and problems and, discerning our deepest needs, incorporates us into the plan and purposes of God. Where we are silent or confused, He speaks for us. So God's will is completed in us, even though we don't understand it fully.

God knows what is weed and what is wheat. He doesn't demand perfection of us. He only demands our faith, our trust, our faithfulness.

We may want to sort out the weeds from the wheat, but God doesn't worry about it, because there is both weed and wheat in all of us. He knows the plans He has for you and me, and how He is going to do the sort. So hope in Him. Trust in Him. He has a plan for your life. You may not always know what He is doing, but be assured – He is in charge. He knows what He's doing. He will bring in the harvest.

*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*⁷

⁶ Romans 8:26c-28 (NLT)

⁷ Matthew 13:43 (NRSV)