



Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,"²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.²⁷ 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?'²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.³⁰ 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."'" . . .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."³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

In Life, There are Winners, and There are Losers

Which ones are we?

There are few things more exasperating than an underperforming sports team. When a team is supposed to be winning but continues to lose, it can drive a fan crazy. There's nothing worse! Well actually, what's even worse is when the losing team *acts* like they're actually winning. They say that they're trying, everyone on the team is doing their best, it's just not coming together in the form of wins! So, the real problem seems to be that they don't care about losing as much as *you* do. They don't make any big trades at the trade deadline to improve, because they "like the team [they] have." And *that* is frustrating. A losing team is bad enough, a *delusional* losing team is even worse.

Now, it's not just true in sports but in life in general: there are winners, and there are losers. And for a long, long time, Christians like us enjoyed being counted among the winners. Really ever since the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian and converted the Roman Empire into a Christian realm, Christianity has enjoyed a nice winning streak. That was the case until just lately.

In our time, serious Christians are no longer counted among those with exemplary character or virtues, simply *because* we are Christians. Christians intent on preaching and living by the Word of God are now seen as judgmental and bigoted, closed-minded and out-of-touch. Nowadays, the position that is winning *seems* to be that of non-Christians. Those who affirm multiple, contradictory truths and who hold up *individual feelings* of truth as being absolutely sacred, they're the ones who now have society's approval. Meanwhile, divine, absolute truths—eternally true and springing from God's will—these are rejected. Unbelievers are the winners! (At least, that's how it looks.)

We know, of course, the reality is that *we* are the winners! “[*God*] gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (1 Corinthians 15:57) that’s why we’re all here this morning. But *if* that’s the case, why does it appear like we are losing? Or here’s another question: what if we are *delusional* losers? What if we are the team with a losing record that will not admit or acknowledge it? What if the world is right about us as Christians, that we are the losers, and we just refuse to accept it? Because if Christ is really the Victor, then why isn’t that so easy to see in our everyday experience?

These questions seem to be at the heart of Jesus’ preaching on this occasion. If you were to take your Bible and page through the chapters leading up to Matthew 13, you’d get a sense of the gradual shift in opinion around Jesus. You could page back to Matthew chapter 4 and see Jesus calling His first disciples; immediately, they drop everything and follow Him. They’re not alone, great crowds from all around Israel start coming to Jesus to be healed and to listen to Him. In chapters 5-7, you’d find those great crowds sitting and listening intently to Jesus as He preaches His sermon on the mount. He’s not using parables on that occasion but speaking with straightforward teaching. The people hear these things and are astounded at His authority and understanding. Moving along, we’d see more people coming to Jesus. We’d see a leper forsaking social norms, entering into a crowd, and seeking healing from Jesus. We’d even see an influential Roman centurion humbling himself to come to Jesus asking for help. And we’d see even more and more crowds drop everything and come and follow Jesus.

But then, we get to the first rumblings of opposition. Next, Jesus heals the man with the legion of demons, and the people of the city *beg* Jesus to leave their region. Next, Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed man, and while some see it and glorify God, others see it and accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Pharisees start trying to catch Jesus at fault: they are troubled that He eats with tax collectors and sinners; they ask why He and His disciples are not fasting. Then, Jesus calls the twelve Apostles into their Apostolic positions and warns them that persecution will come to them for following Him. Then we get to see that take place: John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, is imprisoned and seems to start having some doubts. If Jesus is the Messiah, why are things not going so well?

And that leads us into our parable for this morning, which seems to be answering the question: “Why has the good news of the kingdom been met with so much opposition?” Or, we could say, if we are the winners, why does it feel like we’re losing? That’s really the thrust of the question within the parable: **“Master, did you not sow good seeds in your field? How then does it have weeds?”** The Master had planted a wheat field, and after some time passed, it became clear that there wasn’t just *wheat* in that field. There was also a particular weed; the Greek word Jesus uses for the weed is specifically referring to the “Poison Darnel” which is also known as “false wheat.” It’s a weed that bears a close resemblance to wheat until its grain appears, grain which can be fatal to consume.

It’s a bad situation, and the workers are concerned. Had their master gone wrong? Had he been duped into buying bad seed, revealing His own weaknesses as a Master? Of course, the Master knows why the weeds are in the field, **“An enemy has done this.”** The *wheat* was the result of *His* labor, the *weeds* the result of an enemy’s tampering. And then Jesus explains the parable: **“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.”**

There's the answer. Why has the good news of the kingdom been met with so much opposition? If we are the winners, why does it feel like we're losing? ***"An enemy has done this."*** But that doesn't really answer the question of *why* God would *allow* this to continue. If Christ Jesus has won the victory over sin, death, and the devil, why do our everyday experiences not seem to reflect that truth? If Jesus is Lord, why does it seem like Satan is running the show? Why do Christians seem to remain the losers?

Why *isn't* God doing anything about the weeds? That's what *we* wonder, which means we're very much like the disciples! Look at the disciples' request to Jesus in verse 36. He tells them this parable focused on the kingdom of heaven, and what do they call it? They say, ***"Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."*** They've honed in on the weeds, just that one part of the parable, while ignoring all the rest. And so, their focus reflects the question in the parable: ***"Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?"***

And we're the same way, aren't we? We can't stand appearing like the losers. We'd rather just be *rid* of all the unbelievers in this world. We don't have the patience to deal with them. And you can see that quality within us when we're *so* impatient with unbelievers that we often don't even give them the opportunity to reject what we say, because a lot of the time, we just don't even broach the subject of God's Word with them. We figure they wouldn't listen anyway. They're *weeds*. Or when we know of someone who's caught up in sin or hasn't been attending church—oftentimes our approach is to give up on them. We pretend as if there's no chance they could repent or be saved anymore. We're like the workers in the parable: ***"Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?"*** "Can't we just cut them down and burn them already?" But that's not what our Master does.

You know, if you take this parable in conjunction with the parable that comes right before it, the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, you get this idea that Jesus just doesn't know a lot about gardening. After all, He's always doing the exact opposite of what *we* would do! In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, last week's sermon text, Jesus was scattering the seed in all sorts of wrong places: on the road, in the rocks, among the thorns. *We* wouldn't waste precious seed like that! In this parable, we see weeds growing among the crop, and we know what *we* would do! We'd get on our gardening gloves and start pulling the weeds! But that's not what *Jesus* does; instead, He lets both the weeds and the wheat grow alongside each other, which is a *really* neglectful gardening practice.

But in Jesus' parables, He often makes an absurd point which stands out so much from our regular experience, and that's *often* the point of the parable. Why did the sower spread the seed in all of those unproductive places? Because Jesus is indiscriminate with His spreading of the Word. His desire is for ***"all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*** (1 Timothy 2:4) And in this parable, why doesn't the Master pull out the weeds? He doesn't neglect to do so because He's changed His mind about the weeds and decided they're alright after all. Hardly. The Master chooses to withhold judgment on the weeds for the sake of the wheat. Jesus doesn't wield the executioner's sickle right now, because He loves *you*, the wheat. Wheat takes time, it needs to grow. Start ripping up weeds, well, you're liable to take some wheat with it. The Apostle Peter was referring to this same idea, this delayed judgment, when he wrote in his second epistle, ***"Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The***

Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8-9)

So, we see then that these gardening absurdities are very good news for us! Because if Jesus was *discriminate* with His spreading of the Word, only sharing it with those who were *naturally fertile* soul-soil, then certainly none of us would be here this morning. We’d never have been given the opportunity to hear and believe. But Christ ensured that the good news of His love for sinners found its way into our hearts. And if God decided to always uproot the weeds and burn them immediately, then every one of us would already be in hell. Instead, God did for us what *only* the Master Gardener can do: He turned weeds into wheat, sons of the devil into sons of the Kingdom. And one reason for the continuance of weeds in the field is that God can do for them what He’s already done for us.

And so, this parable is one of the clearest explanations that you’ll find in the Bible for the presence of evil in this world. It’s a story of reassurance for believers that wonder about the presence of evil in the world when Jesus is supposed to be *in charge* of the whole world. Afterall, a farmer whose field grows more weeds than wheat doesn’t appear to be much of a farmer. And the God whose world is full of wicked people who casually flout His will with carefree abandon doesn’t appear to be much of a God. And so, we ask the question: if God has won, why do we appear to be the losers?

But Jesus’ overarching point in this parable is that *He really is* the victor. So, don’t be deceived by appearances. Whether it looks like the church is winning or losing is *irrelevant*. No matter how it looks, Jesus is Lord. He gives the orders. His orders are *followed*. The consummation of this kingdom is coming, according to *God’s* plan and on *His* timetable. The day will come when ***“the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 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.”*** On that day, all will know the truth.

In the meantime, we might still struggle being wheat in a weed-infested world. But you can take comfort in this: the Son of Man doesn’t plant just one stalk of wheat at a time. He plants a whole field of wheat, so that each of us can lean on one another when the weeds bear down. We can persevere in our Baptismal grace every day, knowing that we have been declared Sons of God, heirs of the kingdom. We have been shown, together, the reality of things. That we have been declared righteous, and that when this world ends, we will appear as we are, ***“[shining] like the sun in the kingdom of [our] Father.”*** We’re *not* losers, and we’re *not* delusional. We’re simply God’s people trusting in God’s promises. And so, we can say, ***“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:57) Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.