

Stan Myers  
“PARABLE OF THE WEEDS”  
MATTHEW 13:24-30; 36-43

It is difficult for us to understand Islamic terrorists. We have a hard time grasping the depth of their hatred for infidels—those who do not agree with their theology, worldview, and mission. We have a hard time wrapping our minds around their level of commitment—why they would be so determined, why they would be unafraid of combatting such a strong enemy, why they would commit such vicious and barbaric atrocities, and why they would be willing to lay down their own lives for the cause.

I think the reason we have difficulty understanding Islamic terrorists is because we don't understand their cause and why they would be so committed to it. The primary reason these people do what they do is because they believe they have a divine mandate to establish a worldwide theocracy—a world where God (Allah) reigns unrivaled, in a world where His law (sharia) is honored and obeyed by everyone. In order to establish that theocracy they must eradicate the evil in the world, which is anything that does not align with the Koran, including people who are not devout Muslims, secular governments, institutions of education and justice, economic systems, and anything else that might militate against Allah's will and Allah's righteousness.

In other words, these terrorists believe they have been commissioned by Allah to establish his kingdom in the world. They view themselves as the special forces of Allah's army, thus, a holy war (jihad). Their mission is to make the world holy, so that it will be a worthy habitation for Allah.

The reason I am explaining this is to give you a better idea of what the Jews in Jesus' day believed. They also believed that God was going to establish a worldwide theocracy—his kingdom in this world. In that theocracy God (Yahweh) would reign unrivaled and his law (Torah) would be honored and obeyed by everyone. In their understanding of this kingdom, evil would be completely eradicated, for God hates evil and so He obviously will not allow or tolerate it in his kingdom. So, in this kingdom there would not be any rival governments or institutions or systems or people that would militate against God's will and God's righteousness.

Most Jews believed, based on Old Testament prophecies, that God was going to establish His kingdom through a powerful human leader—a person from the lineage of King David—and that this person would be God's emissary to rule His kingdom. They called him Messiah.

There were lots of different perceptions about how God would do this. Some Jews (called zealots) were comparable to ISIS fighters today. They believed they were God's special forces in a holy war to eliminate evil people and systems through sabotage and subterfuge. They were concealed carriers, always armed and ready. But almost every Jew agreed that when Messiah came and established the kingdom, righteousness would be pervasive. Sin, evil, and injustice would be no more.

When Jesus began teaching in Galilee, performing miracles and wonders, and casting out demons, almost everyone who heard about Him wondered if He might be the anticipated Messiah. Jesus was heralded by a fiery prophet named John the Baptist who told people to prepare themselves because the kingdom of God was near, and then he pointed to Jesus and told them that He was that One sent from God—the Messiah.

Jesus himself declared that He was the Messiah, and the proof was in the works that He did. Quoting the prophet Isaiah He said, *“the blind receive their sight and the lame walk,*

*lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them*" (11:5). Isaiah had predicted this would happen when the kingdom arrived. Jesus also declared that if he cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom had come upon them" (12:28).

The people were impressed with these demonstrations of divine power, but they couldn't help but be bewildered when Jesus told them the kingdom had arrived. If the kingdom of heaven had arrived, why had it not triumphed more overtly and visibly? Why was the Roman Empire still intact? Why were they still subjugated? And if Jesus was the Messiah, why was He in Galilee and not Jerusalem? Why wasn't He a political figure? Why did He have a combative relationship with their esteemed leaders?

Jesus addressed these perceptions and this confusion by telling a story. Look at **Matthew 13:24-30**. <sup>24</sup> *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."*

Jesus is addressing a crowd that had followed him to a little cove on the Sea of Galilee a short distance from Capernaum. The crowd was so large that he got into a boat to address them. This is the second of four recorded stories that Jesus told them in that setting, and, as with the first, it is a story about agriculture.

Jesus introduces the parable with the phrase *"the kingdom of heaven may be compared to..."* Remember, parables are simple, down-to-earth stories from everyday life, but they are packed with dynamic spiritual truth—truth that often contradicted the prevailing theological notions of the day. Jesus often used surprise elements in His stories to reveal that truth, so as we look at this story about the kingdom, look for these surprise elements, because they are the focal point of the story.

The story begins with a man sowing seed in his field because he wanted to grow wheat. After he had sowed the seed, an enemy came while his servants were asleep and sabotaged his field by sowing weeds among the wheat. We know from the Greek word translated "weeds" (zizania) that this was *darnel*, a weedy rye grass with poisonous seeds, which in its early stages of growth looks very similar to wheat. However, as the plants grow to maturity, they can easily be distinguished from each other.

When the servants report the growth of the weeds, the "owner" immediately recognizes it as the work of his enemy. But when they offer to remove the weeds immediately, he prohibits them from doing so, postponing their removal and destruction until harvest time. His rationale is that by pulling up the weeds they would endanger the wheat, because the weeds grow so closely entwined with the wheat that if they were extracted both would be uprooted. However, at harvest time he does separate the wheat from the weeds, bundling the weeds and burning them, while gathering the wheat into his barns.

That's the story, which Jesus audience could easily picture in their minds. But what does it mean? What is the truth or the secret about the kingdom that Jesus is declaring? Earlier Jesus said that the crowds would have difficulty understanding these stories, but

apparently so did His disciples, for when they went back to Peter's house in Capernaum, they privately asked Him what this parable meant. Look at **verse 36**. <sup>36</sup> *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."*

The disciples had something better than Google, better than Wikipedia. They could ask Jesus any question at any time and get the definitive answer on any subject. Fortunately, for our benefit as well as theirs, Matthew records their question about this parable and Jesus' explanation.

Before we look at how Jesus responded, I want to submit to you that how He interprets this parable is instructive for how we interpret other parables in which an explanation is *not* given. And I want you to especially notice two things: First, there is one major point to the story, and if we are going to fully comprehend and appreciate the meaning of the parable we need to focus on that major point.

Second, not every detail in the story is germane to its meaning. We're going to see that Jesus does not explain or attach any meaning to some of the things in the story that we might be curious about or that we think might be important, which means that those things are details that are not germane to the meaning.

Jesus begins His explanation in **verse 37**. <sup>37</sup> *He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.* Jesus is Himself the sower of the good seed, even as was the sower in the parable we looked at last week. Jesus is identifying himself as the owner of the field, the Master of the servants, the One who is the beneficiary of the harvest, the One who is sabotaged by His enemy, and the One who decides what will happen to the wheat and the weeds when they are harvested. Since this is a parable about the kingdom, it means that Jesus is the sovereign of this kingdom.

Next, **verse 38a**. <sup>38</sup> *"The field is the world..."* The field where Jesus sows His seed and where Jesus' enemy also sows weeds is the world. The world is the current realm or the current location of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is not Israel, which undoubtedly would have come as a surprise to the disciples. And the kingdom of heaven is not the church, which comes as a surprise to some of us. And so, one of the "secrets" or "mysteries" of the kingdom revealed in this parable is that the kingdom of heaven is not geographical or institutional. The kingdom of heaven is presently invisible and exists in the world.

But even more important and more surprising is that within the realm of the kingdom there are both good and evil people, righteous and unrighteous. Look at the last part of **verse 38b**. *"...The good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one..."*

Sons of the kingdom refers to all people (regardless of gender) who belong to God. These are the ones Jesus has sown throughout His field—the world. They are, then, disciples of Jesus—all those who believe in Him and obey His Father's will. These are people Jesus plants throughout the world for the purpose of producing a harvest.

Sons of the evil one refers to people who belong to the devil. These are people who have not put their faith and trust in Jesus, and they are sown throughout the world by the devil in order to thwart or disrupt the harvest. This is yet another reason why some people (like the Pharisees) refuse to believe in Jesus. They belong to Satan. He is their father.

On another occasion, when Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees, and they claimed that God was their Father, <sup>42</sup> *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but He sent me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> You*

*are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires* (John 6:42-44).

This is yet another secret of the kingdom, and it would have been a huge surprise to the typical Jew in Jesus' day. Not all Jews are or will be part of the kingdom, but only those who believe in Jesus. What is more, those who don't believe in Jesus are not neutral; they actually *belong* to Satan, and that would include even their esteemed religious leaders and Bible scholars.

Jesus goes on in **verse 39a**, <sup>39</sup>*and the enemy who sowed them is the devil*. We already talked about the enemy being the devil, or Satan. But here is yet another "secret" or "mystery" about the kingdom in its present form on earth. Satan is active in the realm of the kingdom. Satan is busy trying to subvert and sabotage the kingdom while it is growing and advancing, and according to this parable he is succeeding to some degree. He has successfully sowed weeds throughout the world. Those weeds are poisonous, they are noxious, they have detrimental and destructive effects on the world, on the kingdom, and on the sons of the kingdom. These sons of the evil one are attempting to hinder the growth and maturity of the sons of the kingdom, and they are attempting to limit their yield at harvest time.

This concept that there is a successful diabolical element within the realm of the kingdom of heaven would have been completely foreign to the Jews in Jesus' day, including Jesus' disciples. Remember, they thought that in the kingdom, in this worldwide theocracy—God (Yahweh) would reign unrivaled and his law (Torah) would be honored and obeyed by everyone. Evil would be completely eradicated. So, in their view of the kingdom there would not be any rivals to run amok or wreak havoc, and especially not Satan.

But Jesus says, that's not so. Righteousness and unrighteousness currently coexist in the realm of the kingdom in its present form, and Satan has been allowed, for the time being, to flex his muscles and do his dirty, devious work.

But a time is coming when this current arrangement will come to a sudden, decisive end. Look at **verse 39b**. *"The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels."*

The end of the age? What age? The age that we presently live in. It is the age where Jesus is, indeed, sitting on His throne, but is in *heaven*, not yet visible to us who live on earth. This age is the world as we now know it and reside in it, where good and evil coexist, where wheat and weeds grow together. It is the world where the kingdom of God is now growing and advancing, but also where the devil's influence is surprisingly strong and effective.

Of course, the question arises, why would Jesus allow righteousness and unrighteousness to currently coexist in His kingdom? Why wouldn't He eradicate all evil immediately?

Jesus does not answer these questions in the parable. So, we are left to speculate. But I think I know the correct answers, because they are precisely the answers Peter gave forty years after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. God has delayed the eradication of all evil and the complete purification of His kingdom because He is so loving and gracious and patient. When asked why Jesus hadn't returned yet, Peter said, *"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 Pet. 3:9).

God is delaying His final judgment on the wicked, He is allowing good and evil to currently coexist, because He is giving people opportunity to respond to His invitation to believe in Jesus, become His sons and daughters, and have eternal life. God is currently expanding His kingdom, and doing so, in the words of the Apostle Paul, by transferring people out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13-14).

God is presently reversing Satan's curse. To say it another way, He is turning weeds into wheat. Many of the weeds that Satan has sown in Jesus' field are becoming wheat, so that Satan's devious scheme is backfiring. And so, Jesus has delayed separating the weeds from the wheat for the benefit of the weeds. He wants "sons of the evil one" to become "sons of the kingdom." And it is all because of His great love for them. He is not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

But this opportunity to be converted from a son of the evil one to a son of the kingdom will not last forever. Jesus tells us that the harvest in His story is "the end of the age," and harvest was a common Old Testament metaphor for judgment. I believe He is referring to the Day of Judgment. Look at **verses 40-43**. *<sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> 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.*

Ever since He died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, Jesus has been the ruler of the kingdom, but because He is presently not visible to us who live on earth in this age, His sovereignty has not been acknowledged by everyone in this world. However, on harvest day, the Day of Judgment, the day Jesus returns to this earth in power and glory, every single person will know and acknowledge that He is King. Paul said, "Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord..." (Phil 2:10).

The reaping process, supervised by Jesus and carried out by His angels, will include gathering *the things that cause sin* as well as the people who break the law—God's law. In other words, on the Day of Judgment, Jesus will permanently eradicate every hint of sin and evil—including lawless people, and He will have His angels, **verse 42**, *throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The *fiery furnace* is a reference to the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3, but it came to be a Jewish metaphor for hell, the final destination of the wicked. It seems certain that this is what Jesus meant here. In that place there will be extreme misery, symbolized by the words, *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. This expression occurs 6 times in Matthew and once in Luke, all with reference to the emotional trauma and agony of hell, and these specific words are often accompanied with a broader description. "A place of outer darkness where the worm never dies, and the fire never goes out."

For anyone who doesn't feel a sense of urgency about sharing Christ with your unsaved loved ones or your colleagues and acquaintances, just spend a while meditating on those words. This is a doom so horrendous and so unbearable that the Son of God came down from heaven and tasted all the bitterness of death for us that he might deliver us from having to experience this anguish (Lenski, p. 539). And the reason He has delayed the harvest, the reason He has allowed the current coexistence of sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one in this present age is so that more people will yet be delivered from this unspeakable horror.

But the destination of the sons of the kingdom, Jesus' followers, is quite the opposite. Look at **verse 43**. *<sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

This is the only place in the Gospels where God's fatherhood is linked with the kingdom, emphasizing that the one who will rule us through eternity is a father to us. The kingdom is not harsh authority but fatherly love (Morris, PNTC). What a day of rejoicing that will be!

What is your response as you have heard Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds? For me personally, I have once again been reminded of the incredible wisdom of our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a plan of salvation that is so thoughtful, so gracious, so kind. Because I was also reminded that *I* was once a poisonous, noxious weed, but by His grace I have been turned into a stalk of wheat that is bearing fruit. And by the way, that's true of you, too.

I've also been reminded of the absolute sovereignty of Jesus—that even though the devil has been allowed to wreak havoc and run amok in the world, Jesus can turn his devious schemes into stories of redemption that magnify his love and grace. We can say, along with Joseph, “What Satan meant for evil, God intended for good, for the salvation of many.”

Finally, I have been reminded of our ultimate hope. In this world there is terrible heartache and suffering and pain and tribulation, because of the weeds Satan has sown. But a day is coming when Jesus shall return, and He *will* make everything right. He will eradicate, once for all, all evil, and will reign in unrivaled goodness and holiness forever.

### “Parable of the Weeds”

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

*Main Idea: The righteous and unrighteous currently coexist in the kingdom of heaven, but at the end of the age they shall be separated and sent to their eternal destinies*

The Sower sows good seed in his field (24)

The Sower is the Son of Man (37)

The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom (38)

The field is the world (38)

A Devious Enemy sows weeds in the same field (25)

The weeds are the sons of the evil one (38)

The enemy is the devil (39)

The Wheat and Weeds grow together in the same field (26)

The Servants' confusion and proposal (27, 28b)

The Master's knowledge and solution (28a, 29-30)

#### Lessons about the Kingdom

There is a period of time when there is a blending of righteous and unrighteous people

Satan has a destructive influence during this period

There is a day of reckoning (harvest) when there will be a separation of good and evil

That separation will be permanent

