

Christians are Wheat Among the Weeds

²⁴Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸“‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

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

³⁷He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰“As the weeds are pulled up 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 weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 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 the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Tell me, if God is in charge of everything in the world, if he is all powerful, if he, in fact, hates sin, then why is there so much evil in the world? If God says that Christians are on the winning team, then why does it so often feel like we're losing the war? How come more and more people, and institutions of higher learning and the media itself seem more openly opposed to what the Bible teaches than ever before. I mean, is God going to just let things get worse and worse in this world? Or does he want his people to go out there and actually do something about all the wickedness and unbelief in the world today?

You know, those are all good questions. And they're questions that Jesus answers for us in our text for today. Today we continue our series on what it means to be a Christian, especially what it means to be a Christian, living in a world that is filled with nonbelievers. Today we take up Jesus' Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat. Only in this case, we're going to flip that around a bit and take as our theme,

Christians are the Wheat among the Weeds.

As we turn to Matthew, chapter 13, we're going to first look at:

1. Jesus' parable itself, then,
2. What Jesus says the parable means, and finally,
3. How this parable applies to our lives today.

The parable itself is pretty straightforward. Jesus says to the crowds, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.”* (13:24-26) The Greek word for weeds here is zinzania. It refers to what today we would call bearded darnel, a plant which in its green stage, looks almost exactly like wheat, but only after it forms a head without any grain in it, can it be identified as a weed. When the man's workers realize that the wheat field is full of weeds, what do they say to their boss? *“Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?”* His answer? *“An enemy did this.”* Their response? *“Do you want us to go and pull them up?”*

Certainly, that's a natural reaction to weeds, isn't it? Isn't that what we're supposed to do with weeds? You pull them or hoe them or chop them down. When I a kid, I used to walk the bean fields of Nebraska with my cousins, pulling milkweed and ragweed and velvetleaf. In fact, I remember a time when we were driving down the farm lane and my uncle slammed on the brakes and ran out into the field to cut down one lone thistle in his field. He didn't want that one weed growing in his field. Isn't that what every farmer wants? A field free of weeds?

Well, not necessarily. At least not this farmer in our text. When his servants asked the farmer if they should pull the weeds in the weed field, what was his answer? *“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds you may uproot the wheat with them. Let them grow together until the harvest.’”* (Matt. 13: 29-30). You see, this farmer knew that in the case of small grains like wheat, weeding the field halfway through the growing season would likely do more harm than good. Better to let all the plants grow until the harvesters can separate the weeds from the wheat, at the end of the season.

Now I think you realize that Jesus told this story for more than just a lesson in agronomy, you know, *“How to Handle Weeds in a Wheat Field.”* No, Jesus used parables like this one to illustrate a spiritual truth. The question is, what was that spiritual truth? What did Jesus mean by this parable? Fortunately for us, Jesus' disciples come right out and ask him for us. They say to Jesus, *“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”* And so, for their benefit and ours, Jesus goes on to define what each component of the parable represents. He says, *“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.”* In other words, the farmer represents Jesus himself. *“The field is the world and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.* Note the distinction between this parable and the one before it. In Jesus' parable of the Sower and the Seed, which Pastor Priewe preached on last week, the seed sown by the farmer represented not people, but rather, the Word of God. In this parable, however, the wheat seed represents people, in this case, the people of the kingdom, in other words, believers in Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus says, *“The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.”* In other words, while God uses his Word to plant faith in human hearts, in order to create believers, the devil works equally hard at preventing people from hearing the Word in order to create unbelievers in the world.

And just as the farmer told his workers to wait for the harvesters to divide the weeds from the wheat, here Jesus tells his disciples who those harvesters are and when the harvest will come. Jesus says, *“The harvest is the end of the age, (or we might call it, Judgment Day). And the harvesters are angels.* Jesus goes on to explain, *“As the weeds are pulled up 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 weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:40-42)*

In other words, just as Jesus promised in Matthew 25, on the Last Day, Jesus will use his angels to divide the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the weeds, the believers from the unbelievers. The unbelievers will be banished to a very real place called hell where they will endure eternal torment. And believers, the ones whom Jesus calls righteous, not because they're better than anyone else, but because God has declared them to be righteous for the sake of Jesus' perfect life in our place—the righteous, in the end, will, “*shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*” In other words, because believers are dressed in Christ's righteousness, we will reflect the glory of God himself, a glory that is brighter than even the sun in the sky.

So that's Jesus' parable and his explanation of the different parts of the parable. The question is, how does that parable apply to our lives today? What is Jesus teaching us in this parable? Well, I think there are several takeaways from this parable. First, when it comes to the question, why is there so much evil in the world? How can it be that Christians face such opposition from unbelievers in the world? Jesus answer is, “Well, don't blame God for that.” Remember, in the parable, it wasn't the farmer who sowed bad seed. It was the enemy. In the parable, the farmer sowed good seed. So it is with God. Scripture says, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. (James 1:17)* When God created this world, it was absolutely perfect. It was not God, but rather God's enemy, the devil, who brought into the world things like sin, and death and fear and disease. Even unbelievers are not the result of something that God did or didn't do. The Bible doesn't teach “double predestination,” the idea that God chose some to be believers and didn't choose others. No, faith is something that God works in human hearts, while Satan is busy trying to steal that faith out of our hearts. When it comes right down to it, sin and unbelief in our world did not come from God. They came from Satan.

Secondly, when it comes to the question, what about all the unbelievers in the world, what about all those who are adamantly opposed to the Christian faith, what about those who are promoting all kinds of godless attitudes and behaviors—wouldn't it be better if they were like, taken “out of the picture”? Wouldn't our lives be so much better if God were to just yank all the weeds out of his wheat field? Jesus' answer is, “No, actually, that's not God' plan.” God doesn't want you or me or even his angels to start lopping off the heads of unbelievers to try to make this world a better place. Our job is not to stamp out unbelief at the point of a sword.

Unfortunately, down through the centuries, there have been some pretty religious people who have gotten that one wrong. You think of Simon Peter, trying to take off the head of one of Jesus' enemies with a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane. Or you think of a man named Saul who was sure that God wanted him to throw into prison all those who had abandoned the Jewish faith in order to become Christians. Or you think about the Church of the Middle Ages enlisting people to go on the Crusades to fight against the Turks, the people we'd today call Muslims. You realize the goal of the Crusades was not to evangelize those unbelievers. It was to kill them. You know, yank those weeds out of the wheat field. Even the Spanish Inquisition or the burning of religious heretics at the stake or declaring that a German monk named Luther was an outlaw who could be shot on sight—all those were examples of religious people who thought that what God wanted them to do with unbelievers in the world was to get rid of them, by force.

But what Jesus is teaching us in this parable is that that is not God's plan. What did the farmer say to his workers about the weeds in the wheat? “*Let them both grow together until the harvest.*” In other words, Jesus is promising that there will be a time when God will take care of the weeds. He'll throw them in the fire to be burned. But that time is not now. And we are not the ones who are going to do it. Instead, we can trust that God will get that done. And he'll get it

down right. He'll give unbelievers what they deserve and he'll give believers what we don't deserve.

But just because Jesus says that we are to let the weeds grow in the world doesn't mean that we are to take the same approach regarding weeds inside the church. Sometimes, when people hear Jesus say that we should let the weeds and wheat grow together, they think Jesus is saying that we should never remove anybody from membership in a congregation like Mount Olive. But that's not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is not talking here about how to deal with unbelievers in the visible church. He's talking about how to deal with unbelievers in the world. Isn't that what Jesus says? *"The field (where the weeds and wheat are growing) is the world."* Our job as Christians is not to weed unbelievers out of the world. But God does say that we are to be concerned about those who are inside the visible church, who say they are believers, but who live and act like unbelievers. In that case, the principle is not, "Just let them grow together." Rather, that's where the words of Matthew 18 apply. *"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you."* Your purpose is not to get them kicked out of church, but rather to bring them back to the open arms of their Savior—before it's too late, as in, before the harvest comes.

Let's face it. Whether we're talking about dealing with blatant unbelief in our world, or secret unbelief in our church, the fact is, as Christians, we live as wheat among the weeds. It's all part of living in a sinful world. God never said, "Once you become a Christian, move into a monastery to get away from the world." God doesn't call us to be isolationists. Rather, he says, *"You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth."* Don't hide your light under a bowl. Rather, *"Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:13,14, 16) And to equip you for that task, what does God do? Through his Word and Sacrament, he continues to remind you what he's done for you. He's taken all of your flaws and failings and sent them to the bottom of the sea. He's dressed you in Christ's holiness and made you sons and daughters of the king. Yes, he's made you his wheat, even in a field that's still full of weeds.

My friends, on the days when it seems like the world is spiraling out of control, when it seems like evil is getting the upper hand, and you feel like you're about to get crushed by the godless forces in our world, remember who you are. You are the wheat that God has planted. And the growing season is not over yet. So be fruitful. Be faithful. And look forward to the harvest, when by God's grace, through faith in his son, God will gather you and all the elect into his heavenly storeroom. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.