

My Garden Is Full of Weeds!

Matthew 13:24-43

Last week we introduced this chapter of parables. Jesus "**spoke many things in parables.**" V. 34 tells us that "**without a parable, He did not speak to them.**"

A. "**Parable**" is from *parabole*, which is a compound word from *ballo*, "to throw or place," and *para*, which means "alongside." Thus a parable is a story or illustration thrown alongside a biblical truth or principle for comparison, to shed light and understanding.

In each of these parables, Jesus likens "**the kingdom of heaven**" to events or circumstances in the daily life of first century Palestine. "**The kingdom of heaven**" is the rule and reign of Jesus Christ in our lives and in our world. It refers to the present spiritual kingdom of Christ that will one day become a physical kingdom.

Let's continue examining Jesus parabolic teachings: *The Parable of the Wheat and Tares*, *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* and *The Parable of the Leaven*.

I. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (vv. 24-30).

A. The Vandalism of a Crop (vv. 24-26).

1. First Jesus speaks of "**a man**," a farmer who "**sowed good seed in his field.**" In the *Parable of the Sower*, Jesus used the metaphor of the soil to explain biblical truth. This time the issue is not the soil but seeds.

2. However, just after the "**good seed**" had been sown, "**while men slept**" (not from laziness, but because it was night) "**his enemy**" went into the field and "**sowed tares among the wheat.**"

3. "**Tares**" comes from the Greek word *zizanion* (dziz-an'-ee-on) which refers to a variety of dandelion weed or false seed. The "**tares**" closely resembled the wheat until the wheat ripened and bore grain. Because "**tares**" could devalue or destroy a wheat crop, such an action was considered a crime and prohibited by Roman law.

4. A few weeks later, "**when grain had sprouted and produced a crop**" the "**tares also appeared**" the work of the enemy was apparent.

B. The Questions of a Servant (vv. 27-28).

1. When the servants saw the "**tares**," they "**came to the owner**" and asked, "**Sir did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares.**" They were confused.

2. The "**owner**" clued them in when he said, "**An enemy has done this.**" It was not uncommon for a few "**tares**" or other weeds to grow up in a wheat field, but this quantity could only be from intentional sabotage.

3. The servants had another question, "**Do you want us then go and gather them [the tares] up?**" They feared the "**tares**" would totally ruin the wheat and sought to save what could be salvaged.

C. The Response of the Sower (vv. 29-30).

1. The "**owner**" was a wise farmer. He knew that pulling up the tares would also uproot the wheat plants because their roots had no doubt become intertwined. He said, "**No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.**"

2. He also feared that good wheat might be mistaken for tares, so he said, "**Let both grow together until harvest.**"

3. At the time of the harvest he would bring in "**reapers**" who knew more than his "**servants**" did about bringing in a crop. He would tell the "**reapers**" to "**first gather together the tares**" and then "**bind them in bundles to burn.**" Only then would they "**gather the wheat**" to the "**barn.**"

4. Like the *Parable of the Sower*, we'll see that later in vv. 36-43 Jesus explained this parable to His disciples.

II. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (vv. 31-32).

A. The Mustard Seed is the Smallest of Seeds (v. 31).

1. Again speaking to the "**multitude**" Jesus said that the "**kingdom of heaven**" is like "**a mustard seed**" that was "**sowed**" in a "**field.**"

2. The most obvious unique characteristic of "**mustard seed**" is its small size. In v. 32, Jesus says that it is "**least of all the seeds.**" The mustard seed was proverbially small. When people wanted to talk about something very small, they would talk about a mustard seed. It was the smallest of seeds that farmers would typically plant. Jesus also used this idea when he spoke about "faith as small as a mustard seed."

3. "**Mustard**" was a widely used herb in that part of the world.

B. The Mustard Seed Grows into a Large Plant (v. 32).

1. Even though the "**mustard seed**" is smaller than all the other garden seeds, "**when it is grown**" it is larger than all the other garden plants, so much so that it "**becomes a tree,**" a plant large enough "**so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.**"

2. Though many varieties of mustard plants become small bushes, there were some in Palestine that grew as high as 12 to 15 feet.

C. Understanding the Mustard Seed Parable.

1. Jesus does not explain the meaning of this parable. That may be because the meaning is self-evident.

2. The meaning of the parable is quite simple. Like a "**mustard seed,**" the kingdom starts very small, and then grows very large.

3. When Jesus began preaching He had few disciples at first, then they grew into great multitudes.

4. In the church age, before Pentecost, there were only 120 in the church. Yet only a few chapters later the apostles are called "**these who have turned the world upside down.**"

5. When we are sharing the gospel of the kingdom, it starts small with our testimonies, nuggets from Scripture, praise to the Lord, yet it can grow into changed lives and generations of new believers.

6. In this church, our work for the kingdom may seem small, but only eternity will tell how large these works will grow!

7. Despite the size, despite the opposition, despite the "**tares**," "**thorns**" and the "**enemy**," the kingdom will survive. Jesus said in Mat.16:18, "**I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**"

III. The Parable of the Leaven (v. 33).

A. This Parable also Teaches Us that Small Things can have Great Influence.

1. A "**woman**" making bread was a common site throughout Palestine in Jesus' day. Everyday the women of the households made bread. It was and is the main staple of life.

2. According to hundreds of years of tradition, a woman would save a piece of "**leaven**" or yeast before baking her bread and use it the next day for the next day's food. One of the wedding traditions was for a mother to give her daughter a piece of her "**leaven**" on the wedding day.

3. Even though "**leaven**" like the "**mustard seed**" starts small, it influences all the "**measures of meal**," until all the dough has yeast.

4. The smallest part of God's "**kingdom**" still has great influence, because the influence of the "**kingdom**" contains the power of God, and His Word.

B. The Leaven within the Bread is a Positive Influence.

1. Leavened bread is always better tasting and more enjoyable than unleavened bread. It represents the good things in life.

2. When God commanded His people to leave Egypt He had them bake unleavened bread to remind them of the hard times in a pagan land.

3. Even though leaven is often used in Scripture to represent the pervasive power of sin and evil, that is not the case here. Evil does not ultimately win, the kingdom of God does.

C. The Positive Influence of God's Kingdom comes from Within.

1. The woman in the parable "**hid**" the leaven in the "**meal**." She pushed it deeply into the dough so that it would spread and cause the bread to rise.

2. In the same way, we are to be "**hid**" in our culture, not that we are not to be noticed but we are to penetrate deeply within it.

3. The basic purpose of both these parables was to help the early disciples understand that the kingdom to which they had given themselves would not fail, but prosper and grow despite the opposition and rejection by many.

IV. The Purpose and Explanation of the Parables (vv. 34-43).

A. Parables Fulfill Prophecy (vv. 34-35). The manner of Jesus speaking in parables was not an afterthought but a part of God's eternal plan. Hundreds of years earlier, Asaph wrote the words Jesus quotes here in Psalm 78.

B. The Explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (vv. 36-43).

1. When Jesus "**sent the multitude away**," the disciples came to Him "**in the house**" and asked Him to explain the *Parable of the Tares*. Obviously they understood part of what Jesus said but not all. They knew that "**tares**" were unbelievers and that the parable was about judgment. Yet their question was like that of the servants who asked, "**Do you want us to go and gather them up?**"

2. Jesus "**the Son of Man**" is the sower in this parable.

3. "**The field is the world.**" Some Bible students have wrongly interpreted the field to refer to God's people or the church in general. Jesus is specific. The parable is not about believers and unbelievers in the church. It's not about the world in the church, but the church in the world.

4. In this parable, the "**good seeds are the sons of the kingdom.**" We are to take root and be fruitful. The "**tares**" are the unsaved "**sons of the wicked one.**"

5. Like the wheat and tares grow side by side. God's children and the children of the "**wicked one**" live side by side. We enjoy the same blessings, eat the same food, go to the same schools, work in the same places, and even in some cases go to the same churches. This lasts until the "**harvest.**"

6. The "**reapers**," God's angels will burn the tares in "**fire**" which is symbolic of the torment of hell with "**wailing and gnashing of teeth.**"

7. The wheat will go into the barn (**24:31**). There in Christ's eternal righteousness, we will "**shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their [our] Father**" (**Dan.12:3**)

V. Truths to Remember from the Parables

- **BE ON-GUARD: We have an enemy, but he will not triumph.**

We're stuck with weeds until harvest time.

And that should not discourage us, it should be a word of encouragement to us.

George Barna wrote a book called *If Things Are So Good, Why Do I Feel So Bad?* This is really one of those basic questions of life which has numerous variations - "If I've done all the right things why did my kids still turn out wrong?"

"Why do bad things happen to good people?"

"If I take care of my garden so well how come I keep getting weeds? If God is in charge, if his kingdom has come, why is there still evil in the world?"

"If Jesus died for the sins of the world and rose victoriously over death - why do people still sin and die?"

"Why are there still grumpy people in the church?"

"Why are my neighbors inconsiderate when I go out of my way to be kind?" "Why? Why? Why?"

Jesus never promised that this world would be weed-free. Don't be discouraged and give up on God because a few of the people who say they belong to him rub you the wrong way - or you believe they're two-faced.

Jesus is saying to us - "Hey, I don't want you to be discouraged and to think that the dismal state of the world (or the church) is the final word. Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. I'm in charge - really I am. I may not be working this thing out the way you want it, in your preferred time frame. But my kingdom is coming into power. It's already up and functioning in some places - in the hearts and lives of some people. And on harvest day all of the loose ends will be wrapped up. You won't have to put up with this nonsense any longer."

- **BE PATIENT: We must not be quick with our judgments.**

There is a real temptation for people of faith to begin taking themselves too seriously - to begin thinking that we're building the kingdom of God and it all somehow depends on us.

But hear Jesus, we're stuck with weeds until harvest time.

Now, this doesn't mean that we sit back and tolerate sin - throwing our hands in the air in hopeless despair. Sure we can have an influence in the world. After all Jesus called us to be salt and light. He called us to be yeast in the dough and mustard seeds - small beginnings that will ultimately have significant impact.

And when sin is obvious and public in the church we must practice church discipline by humbly and lovingly seeking to restore those who have strayed. But listen! We are not going to eliminate evil from the world and we ought not to act as though that were the case.

Every time we try to use worldly influence or power or scheming to get God's work done we end up doing more damage to his kingdom than if we'd just let the weeds grow until harvest time.

Jesus says that we're stuck with the weeds until harvest time - which is probably a good thing when you think about it because some over-zealous gardener might sometimes mistake me or even you for a weed.

Jesus' concern is not to separate the wheat from the weeds, but rather than none of the wheat be lost. The Lord allows us to live in this world of weeds because He is patient and wants people to come to repentance and faith in Him. **"The Lord ... is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."** 2 Peter 3:9.

- **BE TRUE: God's judgment does come in the end.**

Jesus is the judge. Not us. Only he truly knows the condition of your heart. Only he truly knows whether you are good wheat or a weed.

I would like to tell you a story about how a little girl helped the neighbor bully change his ways. The bully's name was Todd, his parents were divorced and he was left to fend for himself. He's rude and for an 8 year old he can swear like a sailor. When he comes over to Heidi's house the quiet surrounding can turn quickly into chaos with fighting, crying and disobeying rules. But Heidi didn't cut Todd out from her circle of friends. Instead, if Todd swore, she told him it was wrong. That God didn't like that. If he started a fight, she told him he'd have to go home. And on Sunday morning, she would collect 2 children's bulletins and 2 Bible in life pictures as she takes one set of each to Todd. She's even taken him to Bible School.

Heidi did not weed out the bully. And it seems to be making a difference. Todd tries hard to be good around Heidi. He's more joyous now, more alert and he plays wells. He has more fun playing that fighting. He and Heidi have even talked about Jesus and Bible stories. Todd needed some help with his repentance. He needed someone who was willing to care or him, not in a judgmental way, but in a loving caring way.

As you look at yourself this morning, remember there is time for repentance, there is time to change. Remember there are those around you with loving, non judgmental hearts that will help you if you want help in your repentance.

Unfortunately, repentance is often misunderstood as an "I can" experience. "I am sorry for my sins. I can do better. I can please you, God." So often we interpret repentance as our way of turning to God. That cannot be. Christianity is not about an individual turning to God. Christianity is about God turning to us.

"In repenting, therefore, we ask the God who has turned towards us, to do his work of putting us to death. Repentance is an "I can't" experience. To repent is to volunteer for death. That is what baptism pictures for us. That we have died to sin and self, and God raised us up to a new life. The repentant person comes before God saying, "I can't do it myself, God. Kill me and give me new life. Bury me today. Raise me to a new life." That is the language of repentance."

Be true. Be honest with God today and respond accordingly.