

Genesis 28:10-19a
 Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23
 Romans 8:12-25
 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43



LET BOTH GROW TOGETHER UNTIL THE HARVEST

Jesus used seven parables in Matthew 13 to describe the kingdom of heaven, and gave the meaning of two to his disciples privately. These two are *The Sower*, which we discussed last week, and *The Wheat and the Weeds* (or *Tares*). We will compare these two parables in our discussion today.

In the Middle East, there was (and is) a real basis for the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Weeds that look just like wheat when they sprout really do exist there. They grow up along with the wheat. You can recognize the weeds when they are fully grown by their different grain, but by this time they have roots entangled with the wheat roots, which makes it hard to pull them up without ruining the wheat. So the farmer waits until the harvest. He reaps both together and separates out first the weeds, then the wheat, which he must do, because the grain from the weeds is bitter and slightly poisonous. One can see how an enemy might deliberately ruin a farmer's crop secretly by sowing weeds like these in his field.

Matt 13:24-30. *Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?' ²⁸He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.'"¹*

- "Let both grow together ..." (v.30). This is the farmer's only choice. Of course he could destroy the whole crop if he wishes, but if he wants grain from the good wheat, he must restrain himself and let the weeds live and grow together with the wheat. And it is just here that one could go too far with the analogy, because a weed is always a weed, but a sinner can repent and be changed. All your sin can be cleansed at the cross of Christ. You can be born again and given a new life that will produce the good fruits of your redemption.
- "... until the harvest" (v.30). Thinking ahead to the harvest, the farmer consoles himself as he looks out at the ripening grain, and sees the wheat and weeds beginning to show themselves for what they really are. "It won't be long now," he says, "until we can get rid of all those weeds and get the wheat into my barn!"

Matt 13:36-43. *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." ³⁷He answered, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. ⁴¹The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."*

- "He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; ..." (v.37). Discuss how the parables of (1) the sower in Matt 13:19-23, and (2) the wheat and the tares in Matt 37-43 describe the kingdom of God in terms of the seed, the weeds, and the harvest:

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

The seed. In The Parable of the Sower (1), the *seed* is the *word*, that is, the words Jesus spoke to the people about the kingdom of God. (Today, the word is the Bible, and the sower has become either the Holy Spirit, or someone inspired by the Spirit, who plants the gospel in the kinds of “soil” Jesus spoke of.) In (2), the *seed* (good seed) are the *sons of the kingdom*, that is, those who receive and believe the Word of God.

The weeds. In (1) the *weeds* (or thorns) are the *cares of the world* and our *delight in riches* – things that choke the word and keep it from giving life to its hearers. Only the seed that falls on good soil produces fruit. In (2) the *weeds* are the *sons of the evil one*, sown in the world by the devil. These are destined for the fires of hell, whereas the wheat (the good seed) is destined for the kingdom of God.

The harvest. It is our Lord’s interpretation of the *harvest* that links the two parables. In the first (1), the *harvest* consists of the fruits resulting from the *word* falling on *good soil*. These are the good works I begin to pursue as I learn to “*live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20).

Thus, (1) is about receiving Jesus Christ and allowing his life in you to produce a harvest of good works. It is about following Christ and paying more attention to him and less attention to yourself and the “*cares of the world and the delight in riches*” (Matt 13:22). It is about following Christ and waiting for the harvest. At that time, we are led to understand from (2) that he, not you, will get rid of the enemy once and for all.

In other words, (1) teaches how we become good by receiving Christ’s life and growing in him. John 1:12 says, “*To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*” Jesus also said in John 15:5, “*I am the vine, you are the branches ... apart from me you can do nothing.*”

Also, in (1), there are four kinds of soil, but the *seed* (the word of God) cannot live and grow in three of them. So in the end there are really only two kinds of soil – that in which the seed fails to grow, and that in which it grows and produces fruit. In this sense, there are really only two kinds of people in the world.

In (2), you could say Jesus gave us the result of (1). There is one growing season (this life), and one harvest. *Just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin (that is, not to die again on a cross) but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.* (Heb 9:27-28). Thus (1) and (2) give us a picture of the world today: the life of Christ is growing in some, and not growing in others.

Both parables have only two outcomes: in (1) the seed either survives or does not survive, and there is no other way for good fruit to be produced. In (2) there are only wheat and weeds – no third kind of plant – and again, only two possible outcomes: “*The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (v.41-43).

The parables of Jesus are not about religious affiliation. They exclude no Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or agnostic from the love of God or from the power of God to redeem and save. But they do say that those who are willing to receive the word of Christ and become fertile ground for it to grow will *shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father* (v.43), and those who reject Christ will burn in hell, *where men will weep and gnash their teeth*. In other words, the outcome of your life absolutely depends on what you do with Jesus Christ – the Son of God.

Furthermore, both parables imply that the life of a Christian is not without problems. Being the kind of soil that allows the word to take root and grow is not always easy, and having a lot of evil weeds around with their roots all tangled up with yours is less than comforting. In fact, the Bible teaches that on account of man’s original sin, it also isn’t so easy for any of God’s creation. *We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* (Rom 8:22-23).

If we know this, Jesus knows it more completely, because it came originally from him. He looked out over the fields of “wheat” and “weeds” and saw the cosmic struggle of good and evil that involves not just man but all creation – the struggle that would take him to the cross. And he looked out over time without end and saw the great harvest coming. He saw you, and he saw me. And he spoke these words: “*In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).