

Matthew 13:24-43

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[0:00] Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seeds in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed seeds amongst the wheat and went away.

! When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 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?

An enemy did this, he replied. The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up? No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.

Let 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.

He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.

[1:06] He told them still another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables.

He did not say anything about them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet. I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.

Then 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. He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man.

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The 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.

[2:15] They will throw them into a blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Amen. Well, I would invite you to turn with me in your Bible to where we read together just these few moments ago as we continue, as we press on in this series of studies in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew chapter 13 and verses 24 to 43. And just to say at the very outset that what I want to do in this passage this morning is to concentrate our attention upon, as titled in the NIV, the parable of the weeds, and then the parable of the weeds explained.

The two parables of the mustard seed and the yeast I'll touch on briefly so towards the end.

I quite enjoy gardening. I quite enjoy gardening, but not so much when I'm given a telling off by the head gardener, as happened recently when I was on my hands and knees weeding.

[3:48] I was given a real earful. It was a real tongue lashing. Why did you pull that up? That's not a weed.

Well, as she walked away, I muttered to myself, battered and bruised. How am I supposed to know what a weed is?

And so I decided to do some online botanical research. And the first thing I learned is that every weed is a plant. And every plant is a weed.

Well, that wasn't much help because how can you tell the difference? What's a weed and what's not a weed? And so I read on and came to this threefold definition.

One, a weed is a plant with little or no recognized value, medicinally, nutritionally, or simply aesthetically, in that it's not nice looking and won't fit in to your herbaceous border.

[5:00] You maybe think of dandelions here. And apologies to you if you like dandelions. Two, a weed is a plant that grows rapidly and in many cases spreads uncontrollably.

And three, a weed is a plant that competes with more valued plants for space, light, water, and nutrients.

And you might think here of the weed that gardeners in Scotland hate most of all, and that's ground elder, particularly invasive.

Well, now I know. And so no more scoldings from the head gardener. Now, in both the botanical setting and the agricultural setting, weed control is all important.

In the botanical setting, if you're serious about gardening, well, you'll spend just as much time weeding as you will planting.

[6:11] And in the agricultural setting, weed control is all important, not least and especially so when the weeds are noxious, causing damage to crops and endangering livestock.

And so if there are weeds in the garden or in the field, you need to get rid of them, whether manually, with a hoe or ripping them out with your hands, or mechanically, with a cultivator, or chemically, with a weed killer, a herbicide.

And if you don't get on top of them, then they'll get on top of you. It's an ongoing battle. Well, here's the big surprise in this parable.

When this farmer discovers that there are weeds in his field, weeds which might endanger his precious crop. Verse 28, the servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up?

No, he answered. No, he answered. No, leave them be. Now, what a shock.

[7:35] But they're weeds. And he says, Don't touch them. Don't touch them. Well, I'll tell you something for nothing. The head gardener wouldn't be impressed with that at all.

Now, what's this all about? And what's it all about? Because this goes against all the laws of horticulture.

Well, let me point out at the very outset that here in this chapter, this is the first of six kingdom parables.

Now, we were thinking about the kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, last time in the parable of the sower. Verse 11, Jesus said, The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you.

It's why Jesus came. It's what his ministry on earth was all about, establishing God's kingdom. And so you go back into chapter 4 and at verse 17, from that time on, Jesus began to preach, Repent.

[8:53] Now, why do you need to repent? And Jesus says, For the kingdom of heaven is near. And God's kingdom is wherever Jesus is worshipped.

It's where he is served and obeyed and honored as king, king of my life, king of my church fellowship, and how we would long for it, king of my country.

And what does this kingdom look like? Well, Jesus tells us in this series of parables, as he says in this repeated phrase, The kingdom of heaven is like.

And so verse 31, he told them another parable, The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.

Verse 33, he told them still another parable, The kingdom of heaven is like yeast.

Verse 44, The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. Verse 45, Again, The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

[10:10] And verse 47, Once again, The kingdom of heaven is like a net, which was let down into a lake.

And here in verse 24, Jesus told them another parable, The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

You see, how does the Lord Jesus Christ grow his kingdom? And grow it so that it expands into all the earth.

It's what Jesus tells us to pray for, isn't it? Your kingdom come. Lord, grow your kingdom. Grow your kingdom here in this fellowship.

Grow your kingdom in Sterling, bringing men and women and boys and girls to live under your good, wise, gracious, and generous rule.

[11:12] And grow it not just throughout the city, but throughout the land, and throughout the whole of the wide world. And the answer as to how Jesus does this is that he grows his kingdom by growing disciples.

He grows his kingdom by growing disciples. And let me begin to show you this through the teaching of this parable.

And what we see in it are three sets of two. In that there are two sowers, there are two crops, and there are two harvests.

Well, let's look at each of these in turn. First of all, the two sowers. Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

Now, in the parable of the sower last time, the seed was the Word of God. In the imagery of this parable, the seed is, if you turn over to verse 38, the field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom.

[12:41] That is, disciples, followers of Jesus. But in this parable, there are two sowers. Not just the one who sows good seed, but the one who sows bad seed.

Verse 25, But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

Now, you might be thinking this morning, who on earth would do something like this? Well, we're forever reading reports in the newspapers, aren't we, of neighbors who, for whatever the reason, fall out with each other.

And sometimes feelings escalate to such an extent that one of the neighbors does something so bad that it brings about a criminal prosecution.

I was reading in the paper just the other day of these neighbors who fell out with each other, and one of them, to hit back for something that had been done to him, took a screwdriver and punctured all four tires on his neighbor's SUV.

[13:53] But unfortunately for him, it was all recorded in CCTV cameras that had been rigged in the expectation that something like this might happen, and the neighbor was prosecuted and found guilty for criminal damage.

Well, in the agricultural setting of these days in Israel, if you fell out with your neighbor because of some slight, because of some offense done to you, then this is what you might do to get your own back.

But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. And when the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

And what we need to try and grasp and understand is that this was utterly devastating. This was utterly devastating.

The authorized version speaks not of weeds, but of tares. This is the parable of the wheat and the tares.

[15:11] And this was most probably, according to most of the commentators, darnel. The botanical term is *Lolium temulentum*.

And it's a plant found today mainly in the Middle East. And the thing about it is that in beginning to grow, in beginning to grow from seed, it looks almost identical to wheat.

So much so that it's been called false wheat. And the effects of sowing darnel were indescribably catastrophic.

Nothing was worse for a farmer. In that the plant is poisonous. And if ingested, can cause death.

And so if it was harvested, along with all the good wheat, the whole of the crop was ruined. Indeed, Roman law in these days demanded the severest penalty for anyone who was found doing this.

[16:28] It was prison or worse. Well, back to the parable, verse 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? An enemy did this, he replied. And of course, the question is, who is the enemy?

Well, Jesus tells us in verse 39, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

Now, what is it exactly so that the devil is doing in the sowing of this bad seed?

Well, this brings us secondly to the two crops. What does the good seed represent? We've already said, disciples, followers of Jesus, Christian believers.

[17:33] You see, Jesus is growing his kingdom. But here's the thing. Whenever Jesus is busy doing this, the devil just doesn't stand there idly by, looking on, and doing nothing.

You see, this is the devil's opposite reaction to Jesus sowing his good seed in that he sows bad seed.

His noxious, destructive weeds. And what do they represent? Verse 38, the weeds are the sons or the children of the evil one.

Now then, who are the sons of the evil one? What do they look like? And what do they do? Well, let's get back to the imagery of the parable in that what does the enemy here not do?

What does he not do? He could do it, but he doesn't. Well, he doesn't set fire to the field. What's happening today in many parts of the world as God's kingdom grows with many thousands, tens of thousands of men and women and boys and girls coming to faith in the Lord Jesus.

[19:00] We hear frequently so from our good friends in North India of the fires, the fires of persecution sweeping through rural communities which have been utterly transformed by the gospel.

But that's not what the enemy, that's not what the devil does here. No. It's much more subtle. Much more subtle. What he does is to infest the field with false wheat.

Remember how we say that in beginning to grow from seed, dandelion was almost inextinguishable from real wheat.

That is, he infests the field and the field is the world with men and women who seem to be the real thing.

Who seem to be real, true, authentic Christians. But they're not. They're not. Now, what's the word that we would use to describe them?

[20:11] Planted by the devil. The word we would use is that they're counterfeit. They're counterfeit Christians.

Now, you all know what a counterfeit is. A number of years ago, Lynn and I were on holiday in Bulgaria of all places and coming home, I knew that I had to speak to the boys and girls in my congregation about this very matter and I was trying to think, how can I illustrate this?

And I saw in a market stall in this town of Bulgaria perfume being sold and I saw Chanel number five.

Chanel number five for the equivalent of eight pounds. Retail 80 pounds in Glasgow, but here in Bulgaria eight pounds.

Was it the real thing? Was it the genuine article? I bought it. I shouldn't have, but I bought it, took it home, opened it up in the church for the children to smell and it smelled like turpentine.

[21:24] Now the thing is, such counterfeit Christians, men and women who claim to be the real thing can do such damage to the Christian cause, to the work of the kingdom, not least in how they behave and how they speak and what they do in such a way that people are put off and people are turned away from the kingdom.

Now you know how it works, I hardly need to tell you, in that it's probably been said to you by someone, maybe someone you've been witnessing to at work and they say to you, oh, so and so claims to be a Christian.

But you know, if that's how a Christian behaves, I don't want to have anything to do with it.

And maybe they've heard this so-called Christian spreading malicious gossip or they've heard this so-called Christian blaspheming, maybe telling dirty jokes, maybe knowing that they sleep around, maybe knowing that they're constantly getting drunk.

And they've turned them off, they've turned them off. Now the apostle Paul spoke about this very matter in 2 Corinthians 11 and at verse 14, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

[23:18] It is not surprising then if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Now let me just say here that we're not to be discouraged about this.

Even though it's so terrible, it's so awful when it happens, it's so very, very sad. Rather, you know, we've to be encouraged about this in that the devil only resorts to this tactic whenever God is growing his kingdom, wherever there's a kingdom work going on.

But this being said, what's to be done about it? Well, this brings us from the two sowers and the two crops to the two harvests.

Now, we've already noted the surprise element in this parable when the weeds are discovered. The servants asked him, do you want us to go and pull them up?

No, he answered, because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.

[24:33] You see, the gardener, the farmer in us says, pull them out, deal with them. But no, you see, God is saying, Jesus is saying here, don't you worry about these weeds for the moment.

These Christians, who are Christians in name only, you leave them to me. I'll deal with them when the time comes.

don't go trying to root them out. You just concentrate on your part in growing the kingdom by living out a Christ-like, Christ-honoring, Christ-beautiful life.

And do this in the knowledge that no matter what the devil does, he will never be able to prevent God's harvest taking place.

Now, that's the big lesson. he will never be able to prevent God's harvest taking place. Verse 30, let both grow together until the harvest.

[25:45] But here's the thing, there are two harvests. At that time, verse 30, I will tell the harvesters, first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles and be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.

And my friends, this is the solemnizing thing here. Not just about this parable, but about all the parables which Jesus told, in that no matter who we are, we're all featured in them.

We're all featured in them. And so, where are you in this parable? Which harvest will you be a part of?

And it all depends on whether or not you're the real thing, whether or not you're the genuine article. and you have true saving faith in Jesus. Well, are you? That's the big gospel question.

[27:06] You see, first of all, do you notice there is a harvest of judgment. And this is so solemnizing, verse 40, as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

The 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. They will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now, my friends, this is Jesus speaking here. this is Jesus speaking here. They will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and so there will be a harvest of judgment.

But then Jesus says that there will be a harvest of salvation. Verse 43, then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

If you're into classical music, you may know that Felix Mendelsohn in his great oratorio Elijah with the prophet Elijah looking forward to the second Elijah, John the Baptist who was the herald of Jesus, Mendelsohn has the tenor sing out these words.

[28:50] Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in their heavenly father's realm. Joy on their head shall be forever lasting and all sorrow and mourning shall flee away forever.

And then after a chorus where reference is made to the coming of Jesus, the contralto sings out. And it's a call that's full of the gospel.

And when Jesus says here at the end of the parable, he who has ears to hear, let him hear, this is the very call that's being issued.

But the contralto sings out and sings out the words of Isaiah 55 and verse 1, O come everyone, everyone that thirsteth, O come to the waters, come to him, hear, and your soul shall live forever. And that's what Jesus is saying here. Hear, hear the word of the gospel and your soul shall live forever and you will be part of that glorious, glorious harvest.

[30:23] And just to underline concerning this harvest of salvation and to try and encourage us in the work of the gospel as we begin to draw to a close this morning.

Look at how this begins. And here we have these two parables, did you notice, that are placed in the middle of this one.

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. And we have them here to do this. We have them here so that we might be encouraged.

Verse 31, he told them another parable, the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

Lynn and I were in Israel a number of years ago and we were in Nazareth. It was a Sunday afternoon and I had been asked to preach in the chapel of the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society Hospital there.

[31 : 33] And before the service I was standing outside the hospital with the hospital's chief administrator and we were standing in the shade of this tree which was about ten feet or so in height, no more than that.

And just before we went into the hospital he paused and he pointed at the tree and he said, by the way, this is a mustard tree. this is a mustard tree.

And looking at it I saw that it was bursting with these small pods and reaching up. I took one off and I split it open and it was filled with seeds.

And when I say that the seeds were small, what I mean is that they were unbelievably minuscule. In actual fact, they looked like brown grains of sand.

Ground grains of sand. That's how small they were. And I was really taken aback looking at this tree and thinking, remembering the words of this parable.

[32 : 41] This from this. This from this. Though it's the smallest of your seeds, yet when it grows, it's the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree.

So that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. Now what's this teaching us? What's this encouraging us? We'll remember what Jesus was saying in these days.

The kingdom of heaven is near. It's here. It's here now. But as the disciples looked out around them, you see, here was this self proclaimed king.

Where was his kingdom? And as far as they were concerned, it was nowhere to be seen. Oh, remember me standing beside that tree in the grounds of the EMMS hospital.

This from this. Think of the Roman Empire of the day, ruling over the then known world. How great, how big, how vast it was.

[33 : 48] And God's kingdom, it was so small, it was so utterly insignificant. Where's the Roman Empire today? And God's kingdom today?

Oh, think of how it's grown and is still growing and growing and growing, exploding in Africa, in Nigeria, the Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, in East Asia, Indonesia, China, in South America, Brazil.

And Jesus not only encourages us with this picture of the kingdom of God growing, he gives us another picture, that of the kingdom of God transforming, changing lives and changing societies.

Verse 33, he told them still another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked its way all through the dough.

And what Jesus is underlining is the smallness of the lump and the hiddenness of the work. You all watch Bake Off, don't you?

[35 : 08] Bread week, and the wee bit of yeast is put into the dough and it's put into the drawer, you know, half an hour later.

Can't help think here of China when evangelical missions, such as the China Inland Mission, had to evacuate their missionaries, 1949, 1950, with the coming into being of the communist revolution under the despotic leadership of Mao.

And when China was to open its doors to the world once again and missionaries were going in thinking that they would find a devastated church, they discovered a church that had mushroomed, mushroomed, and no one saw it happening, but it had mushroomed.

time has gone, almost in a word, three applications, in that in the work of the kingdom of God, first of all, we need to work patiently.

Think of the mustard seed being planted in the ground, so small, so tiny, and did it grow to become a tree overnight?

[36 : 38] No. It took years to grow, but grow it did. We need to work patiently. Secondly, we need to work confidently, and confident that though we so very often can't see anything happening like the yeast put into the dough, God is at work.

His word never returns void. God is at work, and is at work so very often, hiddenly so.

We need to work patiently. We need to work confidently. And thirdly, we need to work expectantly. the seed planted in the ground and the yeast hidden in the dough and both accomplished what they had been purposed in doing.

in the words of John Ellerton's great hymn. Do you know his great hymn, The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Descended?

[38 : 03] So be it, Lord, thy throne shall never, like earth's proud empires pass away, thy kingdom stands and grows forever, till all thy creatures own thy sway.

And that's what Jesus is teaching us in this parable. Well, let's pray. Our God and our Father, we bow before your presence and we bow once again bringing our lives under the authority of your word.

We thank you for all the warnings of your word, that there will be a day of coming judgment.

And we want to thank you for all the encouragements and for all the comforts of your word, that you are growing your kingdom throughout all the world.

And our cry this morning for our own fellowship here in Cornerstone is that in these days, Lord God, grow your kingdom kingdom and grow it to the praise and the honor of the sower, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

[39 : 52] Amen.