

**Some Parables of Jesus Found in the Gospel of Matthew**  
**A Study in Eight Lessons**  
**Wednesday Evening Studies**  
**Lesson Two**

**Read Together Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

**Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds**

Once again, Jesus tells a parable and then, when he is alone with the disciples, he provides an allegory for the parable for them. We will try to read the parable as if we are among the crowd hearing the story. What do we hear? What would we have thought about this parable? What would the crowd have thought was unusual about it?

**The Apocalyptic in Parables**

Before discussing the story Jesus tells, let's talk about what it means to describe the parables of Jesus as *apocalyptic* (compare: *eschatological*) We will start with the noun: *apocalypse*, which comes from the Greek word that means *revelation* or *disclosure*; let's look at the opening line of the Revelation to John and consider how this book is seen as "a kind of blueprint of events that are still to transpire in the future, when the history of the world" will come to an end.<sup>1</sup> This book, Revelation, is an apocalypse. What features of the parables of Jesus would be apocalyptic? Apocalyptic stories usually feature these characteristics: 1) they reveal and conceal at the same time, 2) they are about both judgment and salvation, and, in some discourses in Matthew these materials "focus primarily on developing community disciplines of watchfulness and resistance to false prophets and messiahs."<sup>2</sup>

**Hearing the Story That Jesus Told the Crowd**

It appears that Jesus has gone back outside to teach the crowds. Hearers today may miss some of the meaning caught by the crowds around Jesus that day. It is another story about farming. What might the peasant farmers in the crowd have heard in this story? They can identify with the sowing of seeds. It is "good seed," Jesus says (13:24). And perhaps they can identify with "an enemy" that sowed weeds in the same field. Peasants noticed when weeds came up between the good crops. No doubt, it was part of their work to remove them! The servants actively seek the master of the household to let him know about the weeds. "Didn't you sow good seed, sir? Where did these weeds come from?" they ask him (13:27). The master's answer has a strange air about it when he says, "An enemy has done this" (13:28). What enemy can he mean? Do you think the peasants working on the place might have wanted to ask him what he meant? But they do not ask that question. Rather, they ask the master whether they should go and gather the weeds. Do you think the crowd listening to Jesus might have been surprised at this point in the story, when the master says, "No, I don't want you to gather the weeds; you might damage

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<sup>1</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 470.

<sup>2</sup> Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew*, 309-310.

the wheat while you do that" (13:29). So the master tells the servants to leave the weeds; to let them grow up with the wheat; and to wait until harvest time. "I will tell the reapers to collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but to gather the wheat into my barn," he says (13:30).

### **What Strange Things Are Present in This Story**

The weed named in the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds is believed to be darnel, an invasive plant that has a resemblance to wheat at first but is distinguishable as a weed to one who is a veteran farmer. Further, the weed can contaminate the wheat if not removed in the early stages. Later removal of the darnel could ruin the farmer's entire crop of wheat. "The decision of the householder to wait until harvest to separate the weeds from the wheat, then, seems a poor one," says Barbara Reid.

Together, let's consider and discuss these questions:

1. Does the householder's decision reveal "lack of farming knowledge" and "imprudence" as one who might be thinking, greedily, that even the weeds could have some value for him?<sup>3</sup>

2. Where would the loyalty of the peasants lie? What about the landowners in the crowd following Jesus? And where would the Pharisees stand?

One thing is certain. The crowd does not hear the allegory Jesus tells his disciples.

3. So: What might they have thought without the allegorical interpretation?

"Ancient audiences also had an abundance of traditional associations that would tilt them toward understanding the story in metaphorical terms," Stanley Saunders says. "In popular Jewish tradition, householders often represent God, the enemy the devil, and the servants the righteous. Wheat typically represents Israel and weeds the nations."<sup>4</sup> We will see, however, that when Jesus is alone with the disciples, the interpretation he presents to them is not exactly what the crowd might have thought. One of the outcomes of our exploring the story apart from the allegory given by Jesus is to see that we can find some different themes in the parable.

4. How did the field workers judge the householder?

5. Who did they consider the enemy to be? Was it another landowner? If so, how did they feel about that?

6. What does a wealthy landowner think about the householder who wants to allow weeds to grow up entangled with his good crops?

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara E. Reid, *Parables for Preachers Year A* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 96.

<sup>4</sup> Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew*, 129.

7. Does Jesus condemn the religious leaders as the enemy? What clues are there that he does or does not?

Discussion of the allegory Jesus provides (13:36-43) will be included in Sunday school lessons this Sunday coming up.

**Congregational Study of the Parables in the Gospel of Matthew**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, Mississippi**  
**Eight Parable Lessons for Adult and Teen Sunday Study**  
**Lesson Two**

**Read Together Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**  
**The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat**

On Wednesday, we considered some of the unusual things about the parable as we read it without the allegory provided by Jesus. If you missed the Wednesday lesson, put yourself in the crowd that day. Let's say that you are a peasant worker; a landowner; a wealthy landowner; or a religious leader.

1. What do you hear?
2. Those who took part in the lesson on Wednesday, what can you remember that you might tell the others to inspire some ideas about what the crowd might have been thinking?
3. Keep all of this in mind as we go into the allegory that Jesus provides.

**The Allegory Jesus Provides to the Disciples**

We are glad to have the allegorical interpretation that Jesus gives us. It suits us much better than the story without the allegory in which we are asked to be there in the crowd hearing the story without explanation. The allegory suits our Christian vocation, also. We like this story for a number of reasons. Let's explore those reasons together.

1. What are the various metaphors Jesus provides in the allegory?
2. Explain how the symbolic explanation makes you feel about
  - a) God and God's kingdom
  - b) Sin and evil
  - c) The devil vs. Jesus
  - d) Judgment and mercy

**The Roles Disciples Play in Laboring for God? What Surprises Are in the Kingdom?**

Step back from the parable and the allegory a moment and spend just a minute thinking about the parable and about the allegory. What questions do you have about what it means that Jesus begins the parable with these words: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who..." (13:24)?

1. How does the parable itself express something about God's kingdom of heaven that you think sounds as you might have imagined it?

2. How does it express something about that kingdom that seems surprising to you?

### **The Problem of "Rooting Out"**

On Wednesday, we talked about the problems of allowing the wheat and weeds to grow together. If you are a farmer, then, you are puzzled that the householder in the parable tells the servants to leave the weeds alone. The farmers in the audience would have considered that a foolish thing to do. Jesus surely knew that.

1. Why do you imagine Jesus gave the householder the notion of leaving wheat and weeds to grow together?

2. Can you imagine that you are a disciple in the crowd; you hear that part of the parable and wonder along with the crowd about that foolish householder; and then you hear the allegory from Jesus? What do you think?

One commentary points out that (as is true with most parables) we do not know the end of the story. Was it a good harvest? Consider the theme of "patient trust" in the parable. How would you describe it in terms of God in the life of the church?

### **Relationship and Reconciliation**

Jesus came into the world to create relationships with people and to accomplish the start of God's reconciliation with the broken world. We might find some of those ideas in the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Here are some interesting ideas that we can consider together as we conclude the Sunday school lesson. A writer named Amy-Jill Levine suggests that Jesus "offered parables in which those who judge others are trapped into being in relationship with them; he told parables in which those who judge themselves righteous may be wrong or may not realize the full implication of their righteousness." (Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, 229)

What a good observation on which to conclude this lesson. How are we to continue the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in building relationships and bringing about reconciliation among people who seem at odds with us? Does it remind us of the Sermon on the Mount -- loving and praying for enemies?

# Lessons of Love and Hospitality in the Gospel Parables: How Jesus Leads the Church to Love, Welcome, and Serve Our Neighbors

Devotionals by Rev. Joan Gandy  
Based on Parables of Jesus Found in the Gospel of Matthew

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am excited to offer devotional guides for your use during the eight weeks we will be studying Parables of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew. These devotionals may be used by one person, two, a family of five or a room full of relatives and friends! The important thing is to use them faithfully, each week. Of course, have a Bible nearby, also!

The devotionals, it is hoped, may deepen your spiritual experience of reading and studying the beautiful parables of Jesus. If you are able, it is helpful to have a particular time of day when you devote yourself to reading and reflecting. Try to create a space where there are few distractions. Seek God's presence by devoting mind, body, and strength to listening for that divine voice to speak to you through Scripture and prayer. And be with one another, taking time to talk about what you are reading and feeling as you devote yourself to this informal worship time.

There are three devotional readings for each of the eight weeks we will study selected parables in Matthew. Choose the same three days each week to share these little devotionals in your family circle -- maybe Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

Here is how the devotionals are arranged: In addition to a verse or two from the Gospel to guide your spiritual experience, there also is a verse from Psalms that helps perhaps to expand the meaning of the Gospel reading. The devotional concludes with a short prayer that you may read together. Then it is hoped that you will have your own family prayers together. If family prayers are not a habit you have cultivated, this is a great time to try that helpful practice. So: three times a week, devotionals are provided. Use them on whatever days you wish, but do try to enjoy the devotionals during the week designated if possible.

I leave you with these readings with a prayer that God will be with each one of us as we make this journey through parables together in the weeks ahead.

In Christ's love,

*Joan*

**Week Two: May 6-12, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**  
**First Devotional**

*Gospel Verse for the Day:*

"He put before them another parable: The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field" (Matthew 13:24).

*Psalm Verse for the Day:*

"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us" (Psalm 78:2-3).

Read again together the entire parable we're studying this week, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matt. 13:24-30), Jesus liked to speak in parables. Today, many scholars like to interpret those parables. But a faithful reading, reflecting, and interpreting is something all of us can do. As you read this parable, reflect on these words as a family: *field, weeds, good seed, harvest, and barn*. How does God take those ordinary things and make them vivid pictures of what your home life is like because you love and trust God? How does each person in your family appear in those pictures as you reflect on those words? What would you like to say to each other now? What would you like to say to God as you consider God's love and care for you? What is the "field" in your family life? What do you do there? How do you envision "weeds" that invade the life of your family? Name some of those weeds in modern terms. Continue this reflecting with the other words. Ask God to bless the world, your community, and your home. Thanks to the assurance that we have through Scripture, we know that God is a God of good and great blessing.

*And now, pray this prayer; and then continue your family's prayers:*

Dear God, help us to find our own lives in the teachings of Christ, especially in the parables. Lead us to understand what you want us to know about sowing good seed. Especially help us to remember that we do not have to do the hard work of judging others; Christ has taught us that we simply can love and minister to those who need us and are willing to receive the love of Christ we offer. We pray in his holy and precious name. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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**Week Two, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**  
**Second Devotional**

*Gospel Verse for the Day:*

"While everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away" (Matthew 13:25).

*Psalm Verse for the Day:*

"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:11-12).

Everyone was asleep. No one noticed the one who came and dropped bad seeds among the good. No one was expecting it. Why would anyone have looked into the garden that night? How was anyone to know that it might have happened? Jesus does it again. Jesus jars us from sleep and asks us to remember that wakefulness is important when it comes to seeking first the kingdom of God and all that goes with the seeking! The enemy comes. The enemy always comes. The enemy is anything or anyone who can lead hearts to places where Jesus would not take us -- into a place where we huddle in a corner in fear of the world around us; or a place where we give up all hope that we can have a better chance to thrive in the world; or a place that tells us we aren't good enough to be called a disciple of Christ! It is the enemy that does that. We know what to do. Faith and trust are wondrous gifts from God, building up our hearts so that they will not forget how powerfully our God loves us and the beautiful world around us. In faith and trust, we seek God's presence through prayer. And in faith and trust, we read God's word with open minds and hearts to hear fresh messages that keep our discipleship sharp and ever ready to defend against the enemy. We join with one another in worship and in acts of kindness among ourselves in the community around us. Thanks to our great and loving Lord Jesus Christ! He has taught us how to live; he has legions of angels ... "to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11).

*And now, pray this prayer; and then continue your family's prayers.*

Dear God, send your angels to guard this family. Send your Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with gratitude for your many blessings. Help us to be prepared to defeat the enemy who tries to sow bad seeds in our hearts. Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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**Week Two, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**  
**Third Devotional**

*Gospel Verse for the Day:*

"Let both of them grow together until the harvest" (Matthew 13:30).

*Psalm Verse for the Day*

"It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another" (Psalm 75:7).

We are quick to judge. It is a human tendency that comes up strong when it comes. We separate. We put people into the categories of "ins" and "outs" or "good" and "bad." Well, you say, Scripture does that, right? We read of many evil deeds in the Bible, committed even by those who have become some of our great biblical heroes. Yes. They were human, as we are. They were quick to judge and sometimes too quick to decide that their way was the right way or that what they wanted should be theirs. With the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, we see Jesus as a patient planter and cultivator. Jesus watches and waits, taking his time while monitoring the growth of weeds within the crop of wheat. We learn from his caution about separating the weeds from the wheat. Sometimes mingling is a good thing. It's true of life in general and in specific places -- in the workplace, in families, and maybe especially in churches. One of the challenges of all churches (and this goes back to the beginning of our churches) was *and is* to give equal value to each member; to encourage the fainthearted, to build up the weak; to strengthen those who have lost their way. What is more beautiful in a church community than to see someone return who left in despair but returns in hope? How simple and natural it seems to weed a garden. But that simple, natural task can become a disaster if a novice does the weeding and can't really tell the weeds from the rest of the garden plants. Jesus tells us that we are not to execute judgment. We are not hired for that job. We are workers in his field. The psalmist makes it clear: God puts down and lifts up!

*And now, pray this prayer; and then continue your family's prayers:*

Dear God, give us the patience of Jesus. We are so quick to criticize others when we know that our own behavior is not much different from that which we are criticizing! Give us hearts that are humble and open to see your image in every brother and sister we meet. We love you, Lord. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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