

## Parables, part 2

### Matthew 13:24-43

#### The Parable of the Weeds

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. <sup>27</sup> "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?' <sup>28</sup> "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' <sup>29</sup> "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> 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.'"

#### The Parable of the Weeds Explained

<sup>36</sup> 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."<sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> 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, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.<sup>40</sup> "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Tonight we have another powerful parable from Jesus about seed and soil but this message is not so benign as last week.

This parable has been hugely influential throughout history for how the church sees and understands itself.

In 1500 there was one church then, through bloodshed and fear of death, the church split into Protestant and Catholic churches. Since then we have split into over 40,000 denomination throughout the world.

When you hear this fact it speaks to me of a level of dysfunction. Why is this the case? The spirit-ful, God-driven, Body of Christ is so often unable to function in a healthy way. We have power grabs, and politics and we have mud throwing.

Saint Augustine, probably one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church, spent a lot of time on this parable, and quotes it regularly in his teachings. For him it opened his eyes to the nature of the church and explained why this beautiful thing, this miracle on earth, the very bride of Christ can be so ugly and dysfunctional and difficult.

And this is the point that Jesus is making with his parable.

A farmer sows the seed in his field but at night, his enemy come and sows weeds in amongst the good seed. When it all grows up, it's too difficult to separate the good from the bad. In those times there was weeds, called Tares that looked very similar to wheat but by the time the wheat flowers, the roots are tangled together and it's just too hard to separate so the farmer says wait until the harvest, we can separate it then, and burn the weeds.

Then we have the explanation: the farmer is God, his enemy is the devil – simple enough. The wheat is the sons of God, the weeds are the sons of the evil one and the field is the world.

Now this one is a bit trickier ... Jesus starts saying this as a parable about the Kingdom of God in verse 24 and he mentions it again in verse 41. If it's just the world then the parable isn't saying much at all – just that God's people live with Satan's people. But if its talking about The Kingdom of God it makes a bit more sense – it's talking about the church. So it's probably a bit of both, but most commentators see it as talking about the Kingdom of God or church.

So where do we go with this teaching? That the church is filled with plans from the evil one? We could very quickly get ourselves into real trouble: looking at each other... "I think it's him", "I think it's her".

What is Jesus trying to teach us about one of his most precious creation, the church?

I watch this documentary once called *Who Killed the Electric Car?* It was about this electric car that was released in America in the mid-90s and in California there was Law passed called the clean air bill which basically meant that manufactures had to provide clean alternatives to petrol car if they wanted to keep selling in California so all major companies made electric cars, one of which was the EV1.

But they never sold them, they only leased them. Anyway the California state law was overturned in the early 00s after relentless pressure from the oil lobby and having Bush and Arnie in power, they no longer had to sell the electric cars but rather than stop producing them they cancelled all the leases, recalled all the cars and had them crushed. The doco follows all the people forced to give back their perfectly working cars to be crushed.

And now about 20 years later fully electric cars are just making their way back on the market. The point is, that where there is something good in the world there will always be the forces of evil there to oppose it.

Jesus is telling us God's people will always face opposition, even from within. When we are in the act of trying to do good, trying to do the will of God in this world, trying to Love God and love our neighbour, we will always face opposition.

I read a story about some archaeologists on a dig in Rome who found an old school site, uncovered a picture dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century of a boy worshipping a cross with a man on it, but the man had the head of a donkey "Alexamenos worships his God" – right from the very start of time Christians have met opposition.

We face our opposition today but sometimes our opposition comes from within. The weeds grow amongst us.

We have to make sure we don't become a little bit weedy in our attitudes. We have to be careful we don't inadvertently do the work of the evil one and halt the work of God.

The church isn't very good at change historically and in a time where change is happening faster than ever the church is struggling to keep up. So when people want to make changes or try something new or if someone has a grand idea we have to not be the opposition that prevents God work being done in a different and new way.

You are probably all thinking that's not us, we're the ones doing new ministry. That might be true but one day you will be on the church council or the property committee and the youth leaders will come to you and say we want to do something like paint the basement pink or build a hover board ramp or turn the library into a virtual reality room and we will be the ones thinking that's ridiculous, what are they thinking? And we have to stop and think, NO I won't plants the weeds in this idea.

We live in a time where God has established his church but there have been obstacles put in the way. But the work of the evil one is not something to get too obsessed over but also not for us to completely forget about. In the life of the church there will be weeds, there are good things in this world tainted by the evil one.

For example the internet. We love the web, with information open to people all over the world, democratized information which opens paths for commerce and trade. But it has also increases the effects of porn on our society, cyber bullying, and avenues for predators to gain access to minors. Something inherently good for the world gets filled with weeds.

But having said all this what is Jesus calling us to do? What is our response? Because what are the farmers helpers instructed to do about the weeds?

*<sup>28</sup> "An enemy did this," he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' <sup>29</sup> "No," he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Matthew 13:28-29*

He tells us to do nothing, no witch hunts, no uprooting anything. In fact he says in verse 30, let them both grow together. This is really a parable of religious tolerance. Jesus is preaching do not let dissent, or disagreement or conflict cause you to pull up your crops – to give up or move on. But in fact grow together with those that are different and difficult.

I was once at a church doing youth stuff where the treasurer was really difficult. I was always worried about getting in trouble, damaging something. He would always shoot new ideas down. But my minister said, you just have to talk anything new out with him, help him process it. And it was true, he was extremely helpful for the youth, I just had to change my approach. If I had just said, this is hopeless, I'm not talking to this guys we would have just given up.

Martin Luther King was a man that understood a bit about tolerance. He took this idea even further about living as people of religious tolerance. He once said:

*From this observe what raging and furious people we have been these many years, in that we desired to force others to believe; the Turks with the sword, heretics with fire, the Jews with death, and thus outroot the tares [weeds] by our own power, as if we were the ones who could reign over hearts and spirits, and make them pious and right, which God's Word alone must do. But by murder we separate the people from the Word, so that it cannot possibly work upon them and we bring thus, with one stroke a double murder upon ourselves, as far as it lies in our power, namely, in that we murder the body for time and the soul for eternity, and afterwards say we did God a service by our actions, and wish to merit something special in heaven.*

Judgment is divine because we are not good and deciding what it right and just. History is full of the church's mistake because it tried to do what God had told it not to. We are told to grow together with those working for and against the kingdom. That it we choose to pull out the weeds, we will only lead ourselves to ruin.

I wanted to finish with the words of Martin Luther King

*Although the weeds hinder the wheat, yet they make it the more beautiful to behold.*