

THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS
MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Dennis Rader grew up in Witchita in the forties and fifties. Both of his parents had jobs outside of the home and unfortunately did not give their kids a lot of attention. But Dennis did OK in school. He went to Kansas Wesleyan University for a short time and then enlisted in the Air Force, where he served his country for four years. After his Air Force stint he went to Witchita State, where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in the Administration of Justice. He then got a job with ADT Security Services. Later he worked for the city of Witchita.

Dennis Rader had two kids and was married for 34 years. He volunteered as a Cub Scout leader. He served as the president of the church council at his local Lutheran church. Outwardly he seemed to be an upstanding citizen. But between 1974 and 1991 Dennis Rader committed ten murders, most of them involving women. He sent taunting letters to police and media outlets describing the details of his crimes. Eventually he was arrested and sent to prison. Can you imagine the reaction of fellow church members and parents of those Cub Scouts when they found out the truth about Dennis Rader?

Evil in the world about us is not always immediately obvious. There are evil people and evil ideas and evil actions that are not always apparent. But when we become victims of those evil people or evil ideas or evil actions, the results can be traumatic. What we need in those situations is perspective, some kind of framework by which we can make sense of such evil.

Jesus Christ knew what it was to experience evil. He was God who became man. He lived a sinless life. Yet He was crucified by the creatures whom He had graciously created. There were seemingly moral, religious, respectable men of the community who orchestrated his death. As One who truly knows the meaning of evil from personal experience He gives us wisdom to hang on to in the gospel accounts of His life. He gives us perspective in the passage before us this morning.

Last week we began our study of the parables by looking at the Parable of the Soils. In that story we saw that Jesus and His followers are sowers of the seed, which represents the good news about the coming kingdom. The disciples are to be confident in the power of that message. They are to be aware that the message will be received differently according to the quality of the soil. Satan will take away the message before it even gets a hearing from some. Others will abandon it when affliction arises. The worries of the world will choke others and prevent them from bearing fruit. But some will be receptive to the message and will bear fruit abundantly.

I.

Our parable today follows immediately after the Parable of the Soils as it is described in Matthew's gospel. So it may have been given on the same occasion. We saw last week that the setting was the north shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. Most of the parables that Matthew recorded deal with descriptions that Jesus gave of the kingdom of heaven. So to understand the particular kingdom parable before us we need to have some understanding of THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (PROJECTOR ON--- I. KINGDOM OF HEAVEN) as it is explained in Matthew's Gospel. I gave a brief description last Sunday of the way that the term is used in the Bible. I will go into more detail now.

Evangelical scholars have generally concluded that the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are synonymous. But the two terms are used to refer to slightly different things in the Bible. To determine the meaning of a particular usage of one of these terms we must look very carefully at the context in which it appears.

A.

Sometimes the term "kingdom," or "God's kingdom," is used in the Bible to refer to GOD'S UNIVERSAL RULE. (I. A. GOD'S UNIVERSAL RULE) God, as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, is ultimately in charge of what happens in the world. In this sense the world is His kingdom. Psalm 22 v.28 (PSALM 22:28) is one example of this kind of usage. King David writes in this verse, "**For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.**" This has been called the eternal, or universal, aspect of God's kingdom.

B.

Since the creation of man God has shared His kingdom rule with human beings. It began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It continued through people like Noah and Abraham. God gave specific promises to Abraham's descendants, which eventually included Moses and the judges and the kings of Israel. God mediated His rule over the world through these descendants of Abraham. (I. A. B. GOD'S THEOCRATIC RULE) This aspect of the kingdom of God is sometimes referred to as GOD'S THEOCRATIC RULE. A theocracy is a government ruled by God through political means. Kings and priests follow God's laws. Israel was a theocracy in that it was governed by God through the Law of Moses. Prophets and priests and then kings were responsible to administer the laws of this kingdom.

C.

In other places the Bible speaks of God's kingdom as JESUS' FUTURE RULE OVER THE EARTH. (I. A. B. C. JESUS' FUTURE RULE OVER THE EARTH) In my interpretation this happens when Jesus returns to earth at the Second Coming. Peace and justice and prosperity and happiness will prevail. Israel will have a prominent position in the world. Daniel 2:44 speaks of that. (DANIEL 2:44) Daniel has a vision from God of this kingdom and describes it like this: "**And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the**

kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”

The picture of this coming kingdom becomes more clear in the New Testament in places like Revelation #20. At the end of v. 4 (REVELATION 20:4) the author speaks of Christians martyred during the seven year Tribulation and says, **“They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”**

The Gospel of Matthew was written largely with Jewish readers in mind. It presents Jesus as the Messiah who was predicted in the Old Testament. Thus in Matthew’s Gospel we find various aspects of this coming earthly kingdom described.

In chapters 1 & 2 we learn about the birth of the ruler of this kingdom. In #3 John the Baptist (MATTHEW 3:2) comes along preaching, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** The time of the inauguration of this kingdom is near. In #4 Jesus begins preaching the same message. In chapters 5-7--- the Sermon on the Mount--- Jesus describes the characteristics of the citizens of this new kingdom. In chapters 8 & 9 Jesus performs miracles to demonstrate that He is the messiah prophesied in the Old Testament and the One qualified to be ruler of this kingdom. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Then Jesus sends out the twelve apostles to spread the news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That is #10. In chapters 11 & 12 we see these messengers and the message being rejected by the nation of Israel, especially by the religious rulers. So in chapters 12 & 13 Jesus begins to teach His disciples that the coming of this earthly kingdom is going to be postponed.

The natural question then becomes: What is going to happen in the meantime? Here Jesus begins to speak in parables. In vv. 10-13 of #13 we read, **“Then the disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ 11 And he answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”**

The religious leaders have rejected the offer of God’s kingdom and Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah. So Jesus speaks in parables, parables which hide the truth from the religious leaders. But Jesus explains their meaning to His disciples.

D.

These parables describe a fourth aspect of the kingdom of heaven. This is THE MYSTERY FORM OF THE KINGDOM. (I. A. B. C. D. THE MYSTERY FORM OF THE KINGDOM) There is the universal rule of God. There is the theocratic kingdom, which in most of the Old Testament involves the prominence of Israel being governed by the Jewish law of the first five books of the Bible. There is a coming earthly kingdom where Christ will rule upon the earth. Because Israel as a whole has rejected Jesus as its

Messiah, the establishment of the earthly kingdom is delayed. In the meantime there is another form of the kingdom where Christ will be at work through His followers. This will be a spiritual kingdom. This is the mystery form of the kingdom where Christ will physically be absent but spiritually present in the lives of His followers upon the earth.

In #13 then Jesus tells a number of parables to describe what this kingdom will be like. In the first parable, known as the Parable of the Soils, Jesus says that people in this kingdom will have differing responses to the gospel. In the second parable He describes two kinds of seeds. It is this second parable that we are going to consider more carefully.

II.

Thus we come to Roman numeral II in the outline, THE PARABLE. Beginning in v. 24 we read, **“He put another parable before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.’”**

Weeds (PROJECTOR ON--- TARES), or tares as some translations have it, refer to a kind of grass that is also called darnel. This weed is found in the Middle East. It initially looks very much like wheat. But tares don't turn golden brown like wheat and have a black colored grain. This grain also tends to get infected with a fungus and becomes poisonous when it does.

In Biblical days, and even occasionally today, someone who had it in for a farmer would take this weed seed and scatter it on his field planted with wheat. That farmer would then have problems, because, as Jesus points out in v. 29, by the time the two kinds of plants are big enough to be distinguished, it would be impossible to root up the weeds without also tearing out the roots of the good wheat. The tares would also come up the following year.

In this parable the enemy sneaks in at night and scatters the weed seeds. Later it becomes evident that some of the plants in the wheat field are weeds and that an enemy has done this. But the landowner tells his slaves that the only thing that they can do is wait until the harvest and make the separation at that time. Then the reapers can collect the weeds and burn them. The wheat will be put into barns.

III.

We come then to THE PARABLE'S MEANING, (III. THE PARABLE'S MEANING) which is explained in vv. 36-43. The first three verses of #13 indicate that Jesus was telling this and other parables to a large group of people who were gathered by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was speaking to them from a boat. It appears to be the same occasion which we described last week in the telling of the Parable of the Soils.

The disciples didn't understand what many of these parables meant. So down in v. 36 we read, **"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.'"** So He proceeded to explain it to them. Perhaps it was the home of Peter in Capernaum which was the setting for this discussion.

In v. 37 Jesus says, **"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man."** In v. 38 He says that the field is the world. In earlier church history men like Luther and Calvin and Augustine said that the kingdom of heaven is the church. Some commentators still do that today. But here Jesus indicates that the realm of the kingdom of God is bigger than just the church. It is the world. Jesus is explaining how the kingdom of heaven can be present in the world while there is still opposition to it.

The seeds in this parable represent two kinds of people. According to v. 38, **"...the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one..."** In the Parable of the Soils the focus was only upon the good seed. Now we find that there is a competitor to this good seed. There are true sons of the kingdom who are obedient to the king, and there are sons of the evil one who are not obedient to the king. The evil one whom these second kind of people obey is identified in v. 39 as the devil. The weeds are the fruit of his work, of his sowing.

The harvest in view occurs at the end of this age, at the end of the time of this spiritual kingdom. It happens when Christ returns to earth. The harvesters are God's angels. Verses 41 & 42 describe what happens next: **"The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

Those who are not sons of the kingdom, not true believers in God, but rather sons of the devil, will spend eternity in a fiery furnace, an unending situation of torment where there will be no second chance. In contrast to this Jesus says, quoting from Daniel 12 v. 3, **"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."**

IV.A.

(IV. THE LESSONS) We come then to THE LESSONS from this parable. The first lesson is that the sons of the kingdom are to SPREAD THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. (IV. THE LESSONS A. SPREAD THE GOSPEL...) The sower of the seed is Jesus, the Son of Man. But once He left the earth physically, the task of spreading the seed was entrusted to His followers who remained behind. They are to scatter that message throughout the world. That was the lesson of the Parable of the Soils which we considered last week.

Back in Matthew 10 vv. 5-7 (MATTHEW 10:5) Jesus sent the twelve apostles out with these instructions: **"These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, (MATTHEW 10:6-7) but**

go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

The apostles were instructed to bring the message of the kingdom first to fellow Jews. The nation of Israel rejected Jesus as its messiah, however. Now Jesus says that the sons of the kingdom will be planted throughout the world. By implication, and later in Matthew by direct command, we who are Christians ought to have our Lord's same concern that the message of the gospel be spread throughout the whole world and that Christians and churches be planted everywhere.

B.

The second lesson is that CHRISTIANS SHOULD EXPECT ENCOUNTERS WITH EVIL. (IV. A. B. CHRISTIANS SHOULD EXPECT...) There is a spiritual war going on in the world around us that involves all of humanity. C.S. Lewis wrote, **"There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counter claimed by Satan."**

Jesus says that it is often difficult to recognize evil. At first the weeds growing up in the field look just like wheat. It is only when the grains appear upon the mature plants that the difference becomes clear. In the crowds that were following Jesus there were many who had not truly made a commitment to become His followers. Even among the twelve apostles there was a weed that had been planted by the devil. At the time that Jesus spoke this parable the other apostles did not know that. It was only after the grain of Judas Iscariot came to fruition in his deed of betrayal that it was evident that Judas was a traitor and a son of the evil one.

Part of the reason that people aren't prepared for evil in our world is that they don't even think in terms of that category, except perhaps some who think that MAGA Republicans would fall into that category. Professor Allan Bloom from the University of Chicago says that he used to ask his students, **"Who do you think is evil? To this one there is an immediate response: Hitler. (Stalin is hardly mentioned.) After him, who else? Up until a couple of years ago, a few students said Nixon, but he has been forgotten... And there it stops. They have no idea of evil; they doubt its existence. Hitler is just another abstraction, an item to fill up an empty category. Although they live in a world in which the most terrible deeds are being performed and they see brutal crime in the streets, they turn aside. Perhaps they believe that evil deeds are performed by persons who, if they got the proper therapy, would not do them again--- that there are evil deeds, not evil people."**

Jesus says that there are evil deeds, and there are evil people. These evil people are ultimately controlled by the devil. If people have trouble thinking in terms of the existence of evil, it should hardly be surprising that they have difficulty accepting the notion of a literal devil. A survey conducted by the Barna group (2011) found that only 43% of Americans believe the devil to be a "living entity," as opposed to a symbol of evil.

When people do think about the personification of evil, they are inclined to picture Hitler or Stalin or Vladimir Putin or a red beast with horns and a pitchfork, all of which are far removed from our everyday lives. Real evil, however, is much more subtle. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians #11 vv. 13-15 is talking about people who give a false story about Jesus. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 CORINTHIANS 11:13) He says that they are **“...false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (1 CORINTHIANS 11:14-15) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”**

Satan does not plant weed seeds that do not look like wheat. He scatters seeds that become plants with remarkable similarities to the real thing. But the end result is grain that is poisonous. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The weeds that the devil plants among us take different forms. Sometimes these weeds take the form of religion. Sometimes the weeds take the form of cults. Many of the cults have a high regard for the Bible. Often cult members have moral lives. They have a zeal for God. Yet because of a slight but terrible perversion of the truth they are weeds and not wheat. Typically they deny the deity of Christ.

Sometimes the weeds take the forms of social causes or political causes. There is a Biblical basis for concern for the environment. But some have made environmentalism into a religion. They treat the earth like a god or goddess. They deny the existence of a Creator who is sovereign over this world.

Evil can be found to be very close to us. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber once observed (*Good and Evil*), **“Since the primary motive of the evil is disguise, one of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one’s evil from oneself, as well as from others, than to be a deacon or some other highly visible form of Christian within our culture? ...I do not mean to imply that the evil are anything other than a small minority among the religious or that the religious motives of most people are in any way spurious. I mean only that evil people tend to gravitate toward piety for the disguise and concealment it can offer them.”** So it has come out in recent months that there have been way too many cases of child abuse in Southern Baptist churches among lay leaders and even pastors. We also know about the problem with child molesters in the priesthood of the Catholic Church.

All of us as Christians must recognize that although we have been transformed by the power of Christ, we still have sin natures. The Bible forces us to recognize that those sin natures can prompt us to do pretty evil things. There but by the grace of God go we.

C.

The third lesson which comes out of this passage is this: IT IS NOT THE JOB OF THE CHURCH TO PERSECUTE RELIGIOUS IMPOSTORS. (IV. A. B. C. IT IS NOT THE JOB OF...) In v. 28 the servants ask the master if they should gather up the weeds.

Jesus replies, **“No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let 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.’”** Jesus indicates that it is not the job of His followers to get rid of false religions and heretical Christian denominations. The danger is that genuine Christians may be hurt in the process.

One of the classic examples of this was the Spanish Inquisition. With the approval of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella a Catholic priest by the name of Torquemada was appointed Grand Inquisitor in 1483. He set out to examine Muslims and Jews who had supposedly converted to Christianity. The grounds for arrest was accusation by another or even mere rumor. The accused was assumed to be guilty until proven innocent and could not be told the identity of the accuser. Charges could involve the slightest deviation from Catholic practice. Victims were tortured to extract a confession. Some two thousand supposed heretics were executed under Torquemada’s supervision.

This is not to say that there is no role for church discipline. There are many admonitions in the New Testament about the need for local church leaders to oppose false teachers and to call out Christians who are guilty of gross sins.

D.

The fourth lesson that this parable teaches us is that JUDGMENT WILL COME. (IV. A. B. C. D. JUDGMENT WILL COME) There will be a time for harvesting. Righteousness will not finally overcome evil until Christ comes back. The world will not become a utopia before then. But when we have been victimized by evil, there is comfort in knowing that Christ will return, and He will mete out justice. Those who are sons of the evil one will be cast into a fiery furnace. According to v. 42, **“In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** Those who are sons of the kingdom will enter the kingdom of their Father, which means participation in the thousand year reign of Jesus on earth.

At the end of that comes the final judgment, known as the Great White Throne Judgment. Verses 14 & 15 of Revelation #20 describe that. The author John says, **“This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”**

The prospect of that coming judgment should also motivate all of us to make sure that we have put our trust in Jesus, who died to pay the penalty for our sins. If we accept Him as our Savior the assurance of the Bible is that we have eternal life.

So this parable teaches us that we should spread the gospel. We should expect to have conflict with evil. We should avoid the temptation to persecute those who reject the true gospel. And we should take comfort in knowing that judgment will come. At the same time that recognition of coming judgment should be an additional motivation for us to scatter the seed, to rescue the perishing, to warn others about this coming judgment and to point them to Jesus.

Charles Colson was a special assistant to the President during the Nixon administration. He helped in the cover-up of the Watergate scandal. In the process, and in some of his other service, he acquired the reputation for being the President's "hatchet man." In some of the things that he did he acted evilly. By his later admission he was a pretty nasty character. Yet he was convinced that his cause was right and that he was on the side of righteousness. It was only when the cover-up began to unravel, and criminal proceedings began to take place that he undertook a careful evaluation of his own life.

There was a friend whom Charles Colson had who was a born again Christian. He also happened to be the top official at Raytheon. His name was Tom Phillips. Tom Phillips was about the business of seed sowing. He cared about Charles Colson in the midst of his difficulties. He prayed for him and talked with him. When he gave Colson the book *Mere Christianity*, by CS Lewis, he read it. In fact he became a Christian as a result of reading it. He put his trust in Jesus.

Another man--- a Democrat--- Senator Harold Hughes of Iowa also took Colson under his wing. When the Democratic senator introduced the Republican hatchet man to a congressional prayer breakfast in Washington as his brother in Christ, people were stunned. It was a testimony that God can turn weeds into wheat and He can use us in the process.

We may not be senators or business executives. But God can use each one of us in our own sphere of influence to resist evil and point people toward the Savior.