

Week 7: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds is a hard text that is made all the more difficult by its placement in Matthew. Not only does it appear in a section that highlights the conflicts between Jesus and those who reject him (12:36-13:[52 or]58), it also immediately follows Jesus' interpretation of the Parable of the Sower. That interpretation contains warnings about things that constitute unfaithfulness and about losing the blessings of the Kingdom. The parable of the Wheat and the Weeds makes the coming judgment of those who oppose God's will more graphic, they will be sent to the place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In the setting of the ministry of Jesus, this parable helps explain why so few accepted him. In its reading in Matthew's church it helps them think about why they are not receiving a better response to their teaching about Jesus. Like the previous parable, this one has been interpreted as an allegory. The Parable of the Sower focused on the hearts of those who eventually turned away, with the exception of the ground where the seed never sprouts. By contrast, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds speaks in more cosmic and eschatological terms. Now people do not just turn away from God's will; here the devil acts deliberately to oppose the purposes of God. Now the seed is not the "Word of the Kingdom" as in the Sower parable, but rather two different kinds of people. The good seed are the "children of the Kingdom" and the weeds are the "children of the evil one" (v. 38). The point is not their literal origin, but that they act like and in the service of either God or the devil.

This parable sees the conflict between good and evil as one that lasts until Judgment Day. God allows the evil to remain so that its removal will not disrupt the growth of the good. Perhaps this suggests that the "children of the evil one" can become "children of the Kingdom." But the main point is that believers should expect opposition to the good that God wants for the world. It also promises that justice will triumph over evil and that the faithful will be vindicated. In v. 41 Jesus tells the angels to gather the wicked people "out of his Kingdom." This is a strange use of "kingdom" in the Gospels. It usually refers to the church and the realm where God's will is done. Here it seems to mean that Christ has just fully established his reign over the world so that it is all a part of his kingdom. So it points to the Judgment Day when God finally removes evil from the world.

While this parable clearly sees the final defeat of evil as something that Only God can accomplish and sees evil as something that will be in the world as long as it lasts, it is not a call for acquiescence. Judgment means both eradicating evil and vindicating the righteous. That means the righteous can make sacrifices for the advancement of the good. The parable intends to encourage to endure difficulties and work for the good. Jesus knows that the conflict will continue, but that does not lead him to acquiesce. Rather, knowing that God is faithful and that the ultimate end of all things is the will of God, Jesus is able to endure suffering and death to work for the good of others. When Matthew's church hears this parable, he wants them to be encouraged to be faithful, to persevere, and to keep doing the good even though evil continues to be all around them.

The church today should also take courage from being reminded that the purposes of God will eventually reign. When we see ourselves surrounded by those who oppose God's will, Jesus says that should not surprise us. Neither should it discourage us. This parable does not say how the "good seed" should act, but we can be sure that it assumes that they conform their lives to God's will. Since that will is clearly to overcome the evils that are in the world (not just the church), the work of God's people is to work for the reign of God's will in the world. We should be encouraged to work for justice and for a culture that embodies God's love.

Let the one with ears listen!