

Summer Blockbusters

The Wheat and the Weeds Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ ²⁸ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” ³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

--Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 *New Revised Standard Version*

The weeds are taking over!

Have you looked around lately? Our society is becoming more and more secular. Fewer and fewer people are going to church. More and more people are claiming to be atheists.

Scandals, greed and corruption are everywhere--in politics, business, education, college athletics. (And yes, I know that includes Carolina, my alma mater, who sent their athletes to fake classes for 20 years.)

More and more we have public figures being caught having affairs or abusing children – and that includes Christian ministers

You watch television – every show is all about sexual immorality.

You turn on the radio – the music is violent, vulgar, overtly sexual.

You go to the grocery store – the covers on the magazines are just one step removed from pornography. If I had children with me I'd want to hide their eyes!

We have horrible atrocities being committed by ISIS in the Middle East. Here at home, we have innocent people being gunned down, in schools, post offices, work places, movie theaters, and most recently, a church.

My friends, the weeds are taking over! Instead of a field of dreams, our world has become a field of weeds!

So what do we do? What do we do about all these weeds?

In today's parable, Jesus tells us what to do about the weeds.

One thing about parables: most of the parables have some kind of surprise. There's a twist in the parable that's unexpected, that goes against the way most people would normally think. So Jesus told a story about a son who took his father's money and ran away from home, and after he squanders his wealth in wild living, he comes back hoping he can be a farm-hand, and SURPRISE! His father welcomes him home!

Jesus told a story about a landowner who hired different people to work in his vineyard:

- Some started working in the early morning, and they worked all day
- Some started at lunch time
- Some started at 3 o'clock
- And some dragged in just in time to work one measly hour
 - And they get to the end of the day and SURPRISE! The landowner pays 'em all the same thing!

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the hero is a guy that most people hated.

In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd leaves 99 unprotected and goes hunting for the one.

Most parables have a surprise, and the lesson is in the surprise. So, in the parable that we're looking at today, we have a farmer who plants seeds. Is that a surprise? Of course not.

An enemy sneaks in and plants weeds. Is that a surprise? Actually, that was done in the time of Jesus. It was an early form of bioterrorism. We know that because there are laws against it in Roman law books. So, no, that's not a surprise.

Then the servants find the weeds and say, "Do you want us to pull 'em up?" Is that a surprise? No, that's exactly what any of us would do.

And then the owner says, "No. Let the weeds grow right along with the wheat." Is that a surprise? A farmer who says, "Ah, don't worry about the weeds?" **YES.**

And herein lies the first message of this parable: **It's not your job to pull up the weeds.** Jesus says, "Let the wheat and the weeds grow together."

And we want to say, "Jesus, have you looked at the world lately? The weeds are taking over! We have to do something! Don't you see what's going on?"

And Jesus says, "Yes, I know what's going on. After all, it is my field. But it's not your job to pull up the weeds."

And you say, "Jesus, why not?" And Jesus says, "Because if YOU try to pull up the weeds, you're going to end up damaging the wheat."

Let's think about some times in history when Christians have tried to pull up the weeds. Back in the Middle Ages, we had the Crusades, when the Christians in Europe decided it would be a good idea to go to the Holy Land and destroy the Muslims who lived there. So they sharpened their swords and they got on their warhorses. And Christian ministers told the soldiers that if they died in the Crusades they would go straight to heaven. And they rode into the Holy Land like angels of death, and they sliced up the Muslims and killed women and children, and the streets of Jerusalem were literally knee-deep in blood.

And the evil that was done in the name of Christ continues to damage the church to this very day. *In the process of trying to pull up weeds, Christians became the worst weeds of all.*

And then in colonial America, there were the Salem witch hunts. The religious leaders in New England wanted a Christian society – all wheat, no weeds. So they said, "We're going to pull up the weeds." And a particular kind of weed they got real concerned about was women who practiced witchcraft. So they listened to rumors, and they acted on hearsay, and they dragged women into court and beat confessions out of them, and in the end they killed around 20 innocent people, including an infant who died in prison

And the evil that was done in the name of Christ continues to damage the church to this very day. *In the process of trying to pull up weeds, Christians became the worst weeds of all.*

Nowadays we don't have the crusades, and we don't have the Salem witch trials--*but we do have an awful lot of judgmental Christians.* And surveys of people who have walked away from church and from faith show that one of the reasons they left is because they feel that Christians are too judgmental. Non-Christians and former Christians find us to be negative, narrow-minded, hypocritical, and no fun to be around! We are known more for what we're against than for what we're for.

I submit to you that this is one more version of us trying to pull up the weeds. We're trying to do God's job. We don't want to wait for God to judge the world, so we're gonna go ahead and do it for him. We forget that God is the weed-puller, not us!

And that's the first message of this parable: *It's not your job to pull up the weeds.*

But wait! There's another surprise.

What happens when the farmer stands back and lets the weeds grow? Is the wheat ruined? Do the weeds destroy the wheat?

You would think they would – because the weeds Jesus mentions are a particularly dangerous type of weed called *darnel*. In the early stages of growth, darnel looks just like wheat. It's very hard to tell the difference. But if you don't pull it up, and it gets mixed in with the wheat, then you've got trouble, because darnel is poisonous. And the roots of darnel get all tangled up with the roots of wheat.

You would think that weeds like this would destroy the wheat. But that's not what happens.

There's still a harvest. There's still a good crop. In the end there's still plenty of wheat to be gathered into the farmer's barn.

And that's the second surprise: **The weeds will not defeat the wheat.**

Why did the enemy sow weeds among the wheat? Because he wanted to destroy the whole thing. But Jesus says, "It's not gonna work. The enemy's not gonna win. It may look like the weeds are taking over. But in the end, the weeds will not defeat the wheat."

It's interesting that in this chapter, Matthew 13, Jesus tells three parables about seeds – and in every one of them there's a planting followed by a surprise.

First there's the parable of the sower. In that parable, a farmer goes out to plant seeds, and he's very unsuccessful! Three-fourths of his seed falls on bad soil. But, SURPRISE: The 25% that falls on good soil still produces a huge crop!

Then there's this parable, where the farmer lets the weeds grow among the wheat and, SURPRISE: The wheat still prevails!

And finally, there's the parable of the mustard seed, where a farmer plants the smallest of all seeds, and SURPRISE: The tiniest seed produces the largest plant!

These parables are messages of hope.

They're telling us that the seed of God's word is still good,
Still growing
Still changing lives
Still making a difference

And in the end, *the weeds will not defeat the wheat.*

So the first surprise is that the farmer says let the weeds grow, and that tells us that *it's not your job to pull up the weeds*. The second surprise is that there's still a good wheat crop, and that tells us that *the weeds will not defeat the wheat*.

The third surprise is what ends up happening to the weeds. Jesus says the weeds are gathered together and burned.

And this is a surprise, because we don't usually think of Jesus as a hellfire and brimstone preacher! We usually think of Jesus the Good Shepherd—kind and loving, merciful and forgiving. He touched lepers. He welcomed the unclean. He hung around with tax collectors and prostitutes.

Jesus is the friend of sinners and the lover of our souls, but now here he is, almost like an angry street preacher, talking about people being gathered up and thrown into the fire.

To a lot of us, that's a surprise. We never thought Jesus would say this kind of stuff.

But the fact is Jesus consistently points to a day of reckoning when the world will be judged and evil will be destroyed. And the question is, "How could a loving God do that?" And the answer is, "How could a loving God NOT do that?"

Listen: God does not hate anybody. But God does hate evil. God hates the sorrow and the sadness and the suffering and pain that are caused by evil. God hates evil *precisely because God loves people*.

But unfortunately, some people choose to hang on to evil. Some people choose to go their own way and do their own thing. Some people refuse to identify with the farmer whose field this is.

When God uproots evil, these folks are going to be uprooted with it – not because God hates them – but because God respects people's choices.

That's the bad news. The good news is this: **Weeds can become wheat!** That's one reason Jesus doesn't want you to pull 'em up! Because there's still a chance! And Jesus wants every single weed to have every possible chance to turn to him and ask for forgiveness and be saved.

So now here's the big question: ***Have you done that?***

Have you made a conscious decision to trust Jesus as your Savior and follow him as Lord?

You say, "Claude, what are you talking about? I'm not a weed!" Well, go back to something I said earlier: The weeds Jesus talked about in this parable looked just like wheat. That means you might *look* like wheat, but still be a weed. You might be somebody who goes to church, and goes to Sunday school and does all kind of nice things in the community, but inside, you've never given your life to Christ; you do not have a *personal* relationship with God. You look like wheat, but the truth is, you're still a weed.

But there's Good News: *Weeds can become wheat!*

Right here, right now, you can bow your head and say, "God, I don't wanna be a weed! I wanna belong to you. I wanna be a child of your Kingdom. And so here and now I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I promise to follow him as my Lord."

If you've never done that, why not do that right now, as we bow our heads?