

## **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

### **I. Verses 24-26**

A wealthy landowner sent his servants out into his fields to plant wheat. During the night, and under cover of darkness, an enemy of the landowner came and planted weeds in the midst of the wheat. Before the sun came up, the enemy was gone. The weed that the enemy planted was darnel, which looks almost identical to wheat until it matures and starts producing poisonous black seeds. The goal of the enemy in planting the darnel was to ruin the landowner's harvest or at least to greatly decrease his profits from the harvest. This kind of thing was certainly not unheard of in Jesus' day. There was even a "Roman law [that] dealt specifically with the crime of sowing darnel in a wheatfield as an act of revenge" (France).

### **II. Verses 27-30**

By the time the weeds in the field finally became evident, it was too late to try and pull them out because their root systems were already well established and would be intertwined with the wheat. To pull up the darnel would be to risk rooting out the wheat as well, before any of the harvest was "ripe". So the landowner told his servants to let both the darnel and the wheat ripen until the harvest. At that time, he would instruct his reapers to gather the weeds first, and bind them in bundles to be burned, and then to gather his wheat into his barn. So what does the parable mean?

### **III. Verses 36-43**

We can summarize Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds of the field like this:

The Son of Man planted sons of the kingdom in the world. The devil also planted his own sons in the world (sons of the evil one). The sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one will both live and grow together in the world until the close of the age. At the close of the age, the Son of Man will send His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers (the sons of the evil one). The sons of the evil one will then be thrown into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

### **Transition**

In light of the parable itself, and now Jesus' explanation of the parable, we need to ask: What "secret" about the kingdom of heaven is this parable meant to reveal to us? When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the people *in parables*, 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" (10-11). So the parable of the weeds of the field is intended to *reveal* to us a *secret* of the kingdom. This is why Jesus begins the parable by saying: "*The kingdom of heaven* may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field..." (24). (Jesus is not comparing the kingdom to the man himself, but to the story as a whole.) And this is why Jesus concludes His explanation of the parable by saying: "He who has ears, let him hear." How wonderfully and undeservedly

privileged we are this morning to be able to know and understand what has otherwise been hidden from so many! May we approach God's Word today truly *in light of* this wonderful privilege that is ours! So what is the "secret" about the kingdom of heaven that Jesus would reveal to us in this parable? Let's start by looking again at the dialogue between the master of the house and his servants in verses 27-30.

#### **IV. Verses 27-30**

Verse 27

It seems like the servants are surprised, if not even distressed. How can there possibly be weeds in the master's field?

Verse 28

When the master acknowledges that these weeds in his field are the work of an enemy, his servants immediately ask if they should go right then and there and root them out. The servants obviously feel like this entire situation is unacceptable and that it should be remedied *immediately*.

Verses 29-30

So it is the master's will that the weeds and the wheat should be left to grow together in his field until the harvest. Only at the harvest will the weeds and the wheat be separated, with the weeds being burned and the wheat gathered into the master's barn.

#### **V. Verses 36-43**

When Jesus explains the parable in verses 36-43, He never mentions this conversation between the master of the house and his servants. But it's interesting to see what He does emphasize as the main point of the parable. In verses 37-39, Jesus simply catalogues who is who and what is what. The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed the weeds is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age. The reapers are angels. Only in verses 40-43 does Jesus come to the *main point* where He focuses all of His attention on the *harvest* when the wicked will be thrown into the fiery furnace and the righteous will be made to shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

Verses 40-43 – Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin (lit. "stumbling blocks") and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

But this in itself was no mystery or secret to anyone! The Old Testament prophets had *already* made all of this crystal clear! In fact, Jesus seems to be alluding to specific Old Testament Scriptures.

- ✓ Zephaniah 1:3 (NKJV) – I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, ***and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked***. I will cut off man from the face of the land,” says the LORD.
- ✓ Daniel 12:2-3 – And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And ***those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever***.
- ✓ Joel 3:12-14 – Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ***Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe***. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

It all seems to be right there in the Old Testament prophets. So what’s the *mystery*? What’s the *secret* about the kingdom that this parable is supposed to be revealing?

## Conclusion

### A. The “secret” that is now revealed

The secret is not the fact that there is a Day of Judgment when the wicked will be separated from the righteous, but rather that this separation is not going to happen, as Jesus says, until the “*close of the age*”. Only “*then*”, Jesus says, will the righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The disciples had assumed that when the Messiah’s kingdom came, the wicked would be *immediately* rooted out, leaving only the righteous as the true sons of the kingdom. They were much like the servants in Jesus’ parable who were shocked at the presence of weeds in the field and who assumed that the master should immediately gather them out of the field. But here is the secret (now being revealed to the disciples) – the promised kingdom of the Messiah has truly come, *and yet* the wicked are still allowed to *remain*. The Messiah’s kingdom and reign is here, and yet the sons of the evil one are not removed. This “secret” was so repulsive and so unimaginable to most of the Jews that they chose to believe that the Messiah’s kingdom was still entirely future. They chose to reject the reality of its presence here and now. And so even today they are still *waiting* for a kingdom that’s *already here* – but in a hidden form. This is the secret that they cannot comprehend – but that *we* absolutely *must* learn to take hold of and understand.

Notice that the one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and that the seed he is sowing is the sons of the kingdom. These things are clearly meant to remind us of Daniel 7:13-14!

- ✓ Daniel 7:13-14 – I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a ***son of man***, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a ***kingdom***, that all peoples, nations, and

languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

In Jesus' parable, we see the Son of Man sowing sons of the kingdom in the world – which tells us that He must already be ruling and reigning as the promised Messiah. He must *already* have received dominion, glory, and a kingdom. Jesus will say in **Matthew 28:18**, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” And yet even as the Messiah is ruling and reigning over the world, the sons of the evil one are still allowed to remain and grow up right along side of the righteous! And now we learn that it will not be until the close of the age that the Son of Man will send his angels to gather *out of His kingdom* all causes of sin and all law-breakers. When the Messiah gathers the sons of the evil one out of His kingdom, the point is not that for right now they are actually part of the Messiah's kingdom. The point is that in so far as they are allowed to remain *in this world*, they are actually living within the sphere/domain of the Messiah's rule – for He is the one who has been granted *all authority* in heaven *and on earth* (Mat. 28:18; cf. France and Carson). The rule of Jesus presently extends over the whole world. His kingdom reign reaches even now to the ends of the earth. *And yet* within the sphere of this kingdom rule, the wicked continue to live and grow right alongside of the righteous often times without any apparent difference at all. This is the secret of the kingdom that Jesus is now revealing to His disciples in the parable of the weeds of the field.

#### B. The “secret” applied

Jesus then concludes the parable with these words: “He who has ears, let him hear.” This isn't simply a fact that we need to know, it is a truth that we desperately need to grasp and then live in light of. Jesus says in effect: He who is able to understand and accept the truth, let him take heed to the parable and its exhortation! And yet how are we supposed to take heed? What is the exhortation to us?

The first lesson we need to learn is that the existence of the sons of the evil one living side by side in this world with the sons of the kingdom does not in any way lessen the *present reality* of the Messiah's kingdom and His sovereign rule and reign over all the world. We are sons, not of a kingdom that is entirely future, but of a kingdom that is presently here. And the fact that the sons of the evil one continue to live side by side with us does not take away from our true identity in any way whatsoever. And yet it is easy for us to forget this. **The longer the sons of the kingdom live in the same world with the sons of the evil one, the more tempting it can be for us to compromise our true identity, and to become secularized in our thinking. The more blinded we become to the powerful presence of the kingdom today, and the more we relegate Christ's rule to some day only in the future, the less equipped we are to live today as the righteous sons (and daughters) of the kingdom that we really are.** Christ is ruling as the promised Messiah even *today*, and that rule extends even now over all the world and has laid claim to every nook, and cranny, and cupboard of our lives. (This we saw in the Sermon on the Mount!) Understanding this truth can both convict us of the areas where we have compromised and also empower us to be more obedient. We need to feel that constant tension between the reality of Jesus' universal kingdom rule and reign, and the continuing presence of the wicked alongside of the righteous. We must *not* accept the present state of things as though it were completely normal and natural. It is a good sign that we understand this parable's secret of the

kingdom if at times we are compelled to ask *why*(!!!), if Jesus is reigning over the world, are the wicked allowed to coexist in the same world with the righteous. And the fact that we will learn the answer to this question in the next set of parables should not in any way lessen this tension. *Do we feel* this tension, or have we become secularized in our thinking and somehow forgotten the full implications and significance of the fact that we *are sons* of the *kingdom*? The reality of the kingdom's presence (of the present rule and reign of the Son of Man over all the world) is not so all-consuming to us as it certainly would have been to the disciples, and so the continued presence of stumbling blocks and law-breakers no longer seems so very painfully wrong and out of place. And yet it's only when we start to take these truths seriously—once we actually start *feeling* the tension—it's only then that we'll be able to fully understand and benefit from Jesus' main exhortation to us in this parable.

Once we start to take these truths seriously—once we actually start *feeling* the tension—we are guaranteed to find ourselves much more prone to feelings of frustration, impatience, discouragement, hopelessness, and even despair. Here we are living in the age of Christ's rule and reign over all the world, and that reality has captured our hearts and thrilled our souls, *and yet* there is no apparent *difference* between the condition of the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one. In fact, often times, as we well know, the wicked seem to fare better than the righteous. Often times, the children of the evil one even oppress and persecute the children of the kingdom! The prophets and psalmists of the Old Testament felt this tension, and yet there is no way that they could have felt the tension to the extent that *we* should be feeling it! They lived in anticipation of the promised kingdom. We live in the day when the kingdom has already arrived. And so Jesus reminds us in this parable that things will not always be this way. One day, at the close of the age, a distinction *will* be made between the sons of the evil one and the sons of the kingdom. "The Son of Man *will* send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. *Then* the righteous *will* shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." "In contrast with the present hiddenness of the kingdom... and [of the sons of the kingdom], one day they will shine in heavenly glory for all to *see*" (France). One day the weeds and the wheat will no longer grow together in the same field. Instead, the weeds will be rooted out and burned, and the wheat will be gathered into the barn. And so in this present stage of the kingdom, when the sons of the evil one live side by side with the sons of the kingdom, Jesus encourages us to be patient, trusting, and always full of hope (cf. Hendriksen). One day everything will be put to rights, and all will be as it should be, and every tension will be removed. To paraphrase one commentator, this parable is a call to *patience*, directing our attention away from the current tension to the coming judgment, when it will be made plain who are the "children of the kingdom" and who are the "children of the Evil One." God is not in a hurry, and so in this parable, Jesus exhorts us to patiently wait for his time – even as we keep on wrestling and struggling with the tension" (cf. France). Remember, it is only when we are truly wrestling and struggling with the tension that we can fully appreciate Jesus' exhortation to be patiently waiting and looking for the harvest when the weeds will finally be separated from the wheat, and we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. I close now with Jesus' closing words: "He who has ears, let him hear."

## Teaching our Children

- ✓ Have your children narrate to you as much as they can remember of Jesus' parable of the weeds of the field (verses 24-30) – then have them explain the meaning of the parable (who is who and what is what; verses 36-43).
  
- Q.** What “secret” about the kingdom does this parable reveal to us?
  - A. ~ See first paragraph under Conclusion A. and last five lines before Conclusion B.
  - ~ Help your children “feel” the tension by reflecting on the Scriptures under Conclusion A. (including Matthew 28:18)
  
- Q.** Since the children of the kingdom are still living in the *same* world with the children of the evil” one, what can they often be tempted to forget?
  - A. ~ They can be tempted to forget the very real fact that Jesus is even *now* ruling and reigning over *all* the world, and that His kingdom rule includes every single part of our lives.
  - ~ Refer to the **bolded** portion on page 4
  
- Q.** If we *really* take this secret of the kingdom seriously and start feeling the tension that comes from knowing that Jesus is reigning over the whole world and yet the children of the evil one are still living side by side with the children of the kingdom, how will we be tempted to feel? Why?
  - A. ~ We will be tempted to feel frustrated, impatient, and discouraged because even though we are the children of the kingdom, there doesn't appear to be much difference between us and the children of the evil one.
  - ~ Sometimes evil people even seem to be better off.
  - ~ Sometimes the children of the evil one oppress and persecute the children of the kingdom!
  
- Q.** How does Jesus encourage us to be patient when we are tempted to feel frustrated and discouraged?
  - A. ~ Jesus reminds us that one day the weeds will be separated from the wheat, and the difference between the children of the evil one and the children of the kingdom will be plain for all to see.
  - ~ The children of the evil one will be cast into the fiery furnace while the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father!
  - ~ We must learn to wait patiently for God's time even as we struggle and wrestle with the tension.
  
- ✓ Talk with your children about how they can be children of the kingdom