



## **Matthew 13:24–30**

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

## **Reflection**

The great theme of Matthew’s gospel is the kingdom of God and in Matthew 13 Jesus gives us seven parables that teach us

about its nature. In Greek, the word ‘parable’, means ‘comparison’, and Jesus begins his six remaining parables with:

‘The kingdom of heaven is like’

Yesterday it was like a farmer sowing seed, today it’s like a wheat crop overrun with weeds. Over the next few days it will be like a seed growing into the largest of trees, hidden treasure found in a field, a merchant selling everything to buy the most perfect pearl he’s ever seen, and fishermen sorting a huge catch. Master story teller that he is, Jesus is addressing a crowd of farmers, merchants and fisherman in the region of Capernaum in language that they can relate to and understand. With his parables Jesus is teaching them about the kingdom of God by mak-

ing comparisons between it and his hearer's daily lives. He's bringing the kingdom to life for them, explaining it in terms he knows they'll understand and remember.

Today Jesus draws them in with a crime drama. Everyone's fascinated by crime dramas, because deep down inside us all is a need for justice, a need to see justice done. And could there be a worse crime amongst this farming community than this one? What a dirty act! You can almost feel those seasoned farmers tensing in anger as Jesus fills out the details. There was even a Roman law that dealt specifically with this crime. It was the crime of sowing a weed called tares in amongst a wheat crop. The Greek word translated 'weeds' in our passage is specifically this type of weed. Sowing tares amongst an enemy's

wheat crop was a particularly malicious crime because as a young plant these weeds look exactly like wheat. As they grew their roots would intermingle with the wheat and you wouldn't realise until it was too late. What's more its grains were poisonous, so when it was mixed in with your wheat the crop would become commercially useless, even dangerous to eat. The only option left was to painstakingly go through your wheat with a fine tooth comb, pulling out what you could, but that would also uproot much of your good wheat and destroy most of your crop. Or, as much as it would hurt, you could do as Jesus suggests in his parable, wait until harvest time, and make the best of a bad situation.

Imagine those farmers hanging off Jesus'

words with clenched jaws as he told this parable. Imagine them muttering amongst themselves, ‘What a dirty act, if that happened to me I’d be furious!’ ‘Yep, he’s right, there’s nothing for it but to bide your time, and wait patiently until harvest, but I don’t know how I’d do it, being sabotaged that like, being betrayed like that, all my hard work down the drain, that enemy needs to pay.’

‘This is what the kingdom of heaven is like,’ teaches Jesus masterfully. ‘Are you with me? Do you understand the situation, can you see the problem, can you imagine what it feels from God’s perspective? God worked hard to create this world, he had a good and perfect plan, fertile soil in the perfect garden, perfect conditions for an abundant harvest, for the flourishing of all

living things. But then an enemy came in, betrayed him, sabotaged him, violated his field, almost ruined everything by sowing these weeds. This is what the kingdom of God is like. Weeds growing up alongside the wheat, root systems intertwined, the wheat struggling for survival, fighting against the weeds for water, sunlight, for life itself. Yet despite how God feels about this situation, and you can imagine how God feels, he's wise. Now is not the time to act, he will act, but not now. Because if he pulls up the weeds, he'll also pull up the wheat. If he calls in the harvest, much of his wheat will not yet be fully grown, so God waits. He wants to punish evil, he wants to purge the earth of all the suffering, injustice and evil within it – but evil lives in the hearts of every human being and so if God acts right now, then both the

wheat and the weeds will come under his judgement. He hates the weeds but because he loves the wheat, he waits. And so just like that farmer, who wakes up every morning and looks out his window in pain seeing his crop struggling to survive amongst the enemy's weeds, God holds off. In his great mercy, in his great forbearance, God graciously holds off judging the earth for as long as he can, until the full harvest of those who will turn to him in repentance and faith has come in, and on that day he will judge the living and the dead, punish all wickedness, and sort out the wheat and the weeds once and for all, forever.

Could there be a better way to explain the kingdom of heaven to these people of the land? Also, we need to remember the ex-



pectations surrounding Jesus. Think about how this parable answers questions like these: 'If you're the Messiah, God's anointed king, who's come into the world to take the fight up to the Romans and re-establish the Jewish nation, why are you sitting on your hands, Jesus? Why don't you act? And why isn't everyone following you? Why are the crowds divided, why are some people for you and some against you, how is it that many of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law have risen to oppose you? And what's God doing anyway? All this evil and injustice and sickness and suffering in our world. So much wickedness and sin. Why doesn't God put a stop to it all? It's like the devil is winning.' Do you see how Jesus' parable so powerfully addresses all these questions?

# Think

Please take some time now to meditate over the kingdom of God in light of this parable. The kingdom of God is like this: wheat amongst the weeds, a sabotaged, struggling harvest. Can you relate to this? What's the lesson of this parable? Is it patience? What light does this parable shed on the problem of evil and suffering in this world? You might reflect on how God feels as he looks out at his suffering harvest. And the satisfaction his enemy feels as he gloats over the mess that he's made of our world. Or you might consider the difficulty we have in sometimes telling the wheat from the weeds. Think about as well the way Christians and unbelievers are often so intertwined in society. Is this just how it is? Or behind this, is it God's

sovereign plan to take what Satan meant for evil and repurpose it for good? Yes, the wheat does share root systems with the weeds, believers and unbelievers, intermingled, co-existent in our society. But what an opportunity that gives us for the gospel! Anything is possible for God, even transforming weeds into wheat – I know because it happened in my life.

## **Pray**

Pray for more transformations like this. Pray for the growth of the kingdom of God as the message of the kingdom continues to go out. And thank God for his great mercy, forbearance, and grace as he holds off his righteousness judgement so that as many people as possible might come to him and be saved.