

**Parables of the Kingdom:  
The Weeds  
Mt 13:24-43**

BACKGROUND

(Keener and DeLashmutt)

- Tares or “weeds” probably refers to darnel, a poisonous weed related to wheat and hard to distinguish from it in the early stages of its growth. “Since both wheat and tares are in the grass family, they look similar shortly after germination. But as soon as wheat begins to form grains, the difference becomes very obvious” (DeLashmutt). Roman law specifically prohibited sowing such poisonous plants in another’s field.
- The weeds’ roots eventually intermingle with those of the wheat. For just a few weeds you could uproot them safely; not for a lot.

QUESTIONS

1. Why, in the parable, don’t the servants pull up the weeds?
2. What are the attributes of the sons of the kingdom (v. 38) and the sons of the evil one, based on Jesus’ interpretation of his parable?
3. We have heard Wright’s idea that Jesus taught in parables in part because his message was threatening enough to endanger him—which is consistent with his saving his clearest parable, the Wicked Tenants, until just before he is crucified.

How does this parable of the kingdom differ from first-century expectations of the kingdom? Is this parable dangerous or provocative? If so, how? (Compare, e.g., with Dan 12:1-3.)

4. Why does Jesus tolerate wicked people in his kingdom (based on this parable)? What do you think of these possible interpretations:
  - “The landowner avoid uprooting the young darnel, which still looks like wheat, because he values the wheat; in the same way, God endures the wicked in the present to provide all those who will receive him time to become his followers (Rom 9:22-24)” (Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 389).
  - Removal of the wicked somehow affects the *development* of the righteous—that perhaps it is impossible to “grow” righteous people in the kingdom while plucking out the wicked people.
  - “Worse yet, since good and evil in this world commonly inhabit not only the same field but even the same individual human beings—since, that is, there are no unqualified good guys any more than there are unqualified bad guys—the only result of a truly dedicated campaign to get rid of evil will be the abolition of literally everybody” (Capon, *Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 101).
  - The Sodom & Gomorrah interpretation: God doesn’t choose, for some reason, to use an implement of justice *fine* enough to select the wicked out from among the throng.

5. In the words of Gary DeLashmutt,

Yes, when Christ returns God himself will create a religiously pure society by removing all who did not respond to his invitation. But during this phase of his kingdom, this is not his will (cf. 13:30). He wants what Leonard Verduin calls a ‘composite society’—Christians living side-by-side with non-Christians in the same society, being in the world by not of it (Jn 17:16-18), being salt and light (Mt 5:13-16)—so that people will be attracted to Christ by our love and message and decide to change [allegiances].

Stated differently, during this age God is against all ‘Christian’ attempts to create a religiously pure society. With certain notable exceptions, the history of the Church has been a tragic failure to observe this lesson. Instead, the Church has usually attempted to dominate human society or, when domination is impossible, to isolate themselves from human society.

When the Church is in the minority, or when its bid to dominate has failed, it has tended to pursue the strategy of isolation. This is what is sometimes called the self-imposed ghettoization of Christianity—angrily denouncing the evils of our society and withdrawing from it to form our own cradle-to-grave Christian subculture. The emphasis shifts from intentionally forming friendships with our non-Christian neighbors and work associates and sharing Christ in that context, to hiding in our holy huddles while we deplore the world’s wickedness.

Do you agree with DeLashmutt’s conclusion that this parable directs the Church to live integrated with the World rather than segregated from it? What should this look like?

6. “...the parable says that *doing nothing* is, for the time being, the preferred response to evil. It insists that the mysterious, paradoxical tactic of noninterference is the only one that can be effective in the time frame within which the servants are working. No matter that they may have plausible protocols for dealing with the menace as they see it; their very proposals, the farmer tells them, are more of a menace than anything else” (Capon, p. 101). Discuss.
7. “The Bible’s only real answer to the problem of evil is, like it or not, the same as the farmer’s answer to the question posed by presence of the weeds: ‘An enemy hath done this’” (Capon, p. 105).

Do you agree?

8. Does this parable have anything to say about capital punishment?
9. Matthew again uses an A-B-A structure for this parable, interrupting it with the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. Why? Does B illuminate or compliment A, or vice-versa?
10. Why does God allow evil in this world?

*Fun Fact:* Note that Jesus, the messiah, fulfills a *divine function* in judging the world (13:41; see also 24:31). Perhaps the best biblical argument for Jesus’ divinity is not his use of titles like *Son of Man*, nor *messiah* (the term used of kings of Israel in OT times) nor even his repeated use of “I am” in John. It is, as N. T. Wright suggests, that Jesus does all the things that had previously been reserved in Judaism for God. (See Wright’s *The Meaning of Jesus*, chapter 10.)