

Kingdom Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Introduction

A young girl had just purchased her first home and wanted to grow a beautiful flower garden there. She wanted that home to be a showcase – something that would make every passerby jealous. But she knew that to achieve her goal, she would need to learn from the best. And so she drove around her new neighborhood, looking at the flowers and watching to see who might be tending them.

One home in particular stood out. She eyed it for weeks, always going out of her way to drive past it. And then, one day, she saw an older man on his knees in front of one of the flower beds. She parked her car, and approached him. At first he didn't want to be bothered, but she persisted. It took time, but eventually she wore him down. It helped, I'm sure, that she would regularly bring him plates of cookies and loaves of homemade bread.

Over the course of their friendship, he taught her everything he knew. She took notes, and after he died she shared his bits of wisdom with the rest of us. Here are a couple of my favorites:

- No matter how hard you try, nothing ever looks as good as it does on the seed packet.
- The best way to guarantee rain is to give your garden a good soaking.
- Annuals mean you will only be disappointed once; perennials mean you will be disappointed several times.
- The best way to make sure you are removing a weed rather than a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes up easily, it was a valuable plant.

This Lenten season we are earnestly praying the second petition of the Lord's Prayer: **THY KINGDOM COME**. This 13th chapter of Matthew contains several stories (parables) that give us insight into how Jesus defines that kingdom. Each of them begins with this same phrase:

The Kingdom of heaven is like ...

Next Thursday evening, Sandy Thompson will talk to us about the good seeds that are sown in the Kingdom of God. Today, it is my task to talk about the weeds.

- When we think kingdom thoughts, we don't often think about weeds. Weeds are not good. We don't like weeds.
- I read that American farmers spent \$4.1 billion on weed killer for their soybean fields last year. That's only one crop, and it doesn't count the amount an American home owner will spend to get rid of dandelions!
- We don't like weeds.

But oddly enough, Jesus tells us that "the kingdom of heaven is like a field full of weeds." That is the kingdom for which you and I are encouraged to pray.

- Praying “Thy Kingdom come” means that we pray earnestly for something we know has both weeds and seeds. Both good and not so good. Both joy and sorrow.

The weeds described in our text are called “bearded darnel.” In the early stages of growth it was nearly impossible to distinguish between this weed and the wheat that had been planted. These weeds were a curse to every hard working farmer.

So bad were they ...

- The Romans had laws with severe punishments for anyone found guilty of spreading them.
- According to one commentator, the phrase “I will plant weeds in your fields” is still considered to be a major threat in India.

So if you were in the audience when Jesus taught this parable, you would likely have gasped at the thought that anyone could have done such a ghastly thing! Everyone in that audience knew how horrible this would be.

- And yet, that is what we pray for:

Thy Kingdom Come ...

The Kingdom of Heaven is like ... weeds in a field

Let me make three observations about these weeds:

OBSERVATION #1: WEEDS HAPPEN WE ARE NOT PAYING ATTENTION

Look at verse 25:

But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (Matthew 13:25)

Most mornings I watch the news on Channel 2. One of the former anchors (John Seibel) would begin each half hour by saying “Here’s what happened while you were sleeping.” All kinds of stuff happened while I was sleeping! And most of it wasn’t good!

If everyone is sleeping, no one is standing guard. And if no one is standing guard, that makes it the perfect time to sow a few weeds. If we were watching, we would never let that happen, but it happens when we are not paying attention.

The Scriptures continually remind us to stay alert:

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* reminds us to “Watch out for the weeds – the things that come between you and God.” He illustrates it like this:

The difference between a plant and a weed is this. For a plant to grow and blossom, you need to take care of it. You have to cultivate, fertilize, prune and water it. A weed? You can do nothing and a weed will grow.

Walk into a garden that is totally neglected, and you'll see weeds. You don't need to put in extra effort. Weeds will come.

Whenever you start to neglect time with God, when you neglect your daily quiet times, when you neglect your small group time, when you start to skip church, any of those sorts of things – weeds are going to grow and they will choke the spiritual life out of you.

(He concludes): Are you experiencing stress, discouragement, a loss of joy and sense of purpose; these are weeds.

That brings us to observation #2:

OBSERVATION #2: THESE WEEDS WERE INTENTIONAL

Look at verses 27-28:

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?" "An enemy did this," he replied. (Matthew 13:27-28)

We met that enemy back in verse 25, but here we get to see the enemy's work.

- Notice that the servants didn't anticipate weeds. They knew good seed had been sown; hence their question: "Where did the weeds come from?"
- There is only one answer. "An enemy did this."

What makes these weeds different than other weeds is that they look like everything else in the garden. Early in the growing cycle not even a seasoned farmer can tell the difference between wheat and bearded darnel. As the harvest nears, the difference is clear. The shape is similar, but the color is a dark grey.

- And they are deadly. Bearded darnel is slightly poisonous. It causes dizziness and it will make you sick. It has a narcotic effect on those who consume it.

But long before the harvest, those weeds are wrapping their roots around the roots of the good seed. That's why the farmer refuses to pull them up when his servants suggest they do so:

"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them." (Matthew 13:29)

The real danger of the weeds is what happens below the surface, in places that cannot be seen. At harvest time, we can see the danger. During the growing season, we can't.

- You might think the stuff you are dabbling in is harmless.
- You might even think it is God's will!
- But be careful!

Wise King Solomon issued a similar warning:

*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.
(Proverbs 14:12)*

Which brings us to our final observation.

#3: THESE WEEDS DON'T WIN

Look at verse 30:

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.'" (Matthew 13:30)

Notice this. These weeds don't win. These weeds don't destroy the wheat. In the end, there is still a harvest to be enjoyed.

BUT ... To get to the harvest, you have to endure the weeds.

There is an enemy out there, and that enemy is sowing all kinds of bad stuff. Have you been paying attention lately? This world is full of:

- Sickness, pain, stress, anxiety
- Dysfunction, turmoil, danger
- Bad theology, false teaching and so on

But the wheat is good seed. IT IS KINGDOM WHEAT!

- Long before the days when scientists learned how to make modern-day seeds resistant to bugs and beetles, the good seed that God sows has the strength to resist the bearded darnel of the devil.

Sometimes we can grow discouraged by the darnel we are forced to endure. When you do, remember this parable. And remember that there is no harvest without weeds. But in the end, the weeds will get what's coming to them, and you will enjoy the harvest.

APPLICATION

Here are a few things I want you to take away from the passage:

1. The enemy is real. His name is Satan. And he is intent on making life rough for anyone who chooses to follow Christ. So he sows weeds throughout this world.
2. Don't go to sleep. If you know the enemy is real, then you must know how important it is to be diligent in those things that grow and maintain your faith.
3. Pray for the harvest. Pray: Thy Kingdom Come!

Our memory verse for this Lenten season:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

Amen.