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BIB336: Parables

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### Parable of the Wheat and Weeds

In Matthew 13:24–30, Jesus Christ shares a thought-provoking Parable of the Weeds. In this parable, Jesus tells the story of a farmer who plants good seeds, but an enemy later arrives and plants weeds among the wheat. As the crops grow, the farmer's servants notice the weeds and ask if they should pull them up, but the farmer instructs them to let both grow together until the harvest. This parable has fascinated theologians and biblical scholars for centuries, having different interpretations. The Parable of the Weeds in Matthew 13:24–30 has literary and theological meaning, historical and cultural context, and practical applications for modern believers. It is necessary that wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest so the weeds may be burned and the wheat gathered and brought to the barn. The meaning of this parable is significant in portraying the message Jesus is trying to provide to Christians and how it applies to their lives today.

In fields and other agricultural regions, you can find two different kinds of plants growing: wheat and weeds. Although they may appear similarly, a few significant distinctions between the two must be recognized. The edible seeds of the cereal grain known as wheat are used to manufacture flour, which is then used to make bread, pasta, and other dishes. On the other hand, weeds are plants that thrive in the wild and are frequently considered unpleasant or unwanted. They may consist of several different species, including dandelions, thistles, and

crabgrass. Compared to cultivated crops like wheat, weeds frequently have more rugged and untidy leaves and stems that might be prickly, hairy, or lumpy.

The Holman Christian Standard Bible describes the weed in the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30 as likely being darnel due to its close relation to wheat and similar appearance during the early stages of growth. Darnel is a grass weed that can be toxic to humans and animals if consumed in large quantities. Additionally, the root systems of wheat and darnel become intertwined as the crop matures, making it difficult to uproot the weed without damaging the wheat. This is consistent with the parable where the farmer instructs his servants to let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest when they will be separated and the weeds burned. Interestingly we see that Jesus related to this parable as something that will happen, as mentioned in the commentary of the study bible “Roman law prohibited spewing darnel in another’s field” (HCSB 1637). Not only this, according to the article Grass Blindness by Howard Thomas says that “the biblical parable about separating the wheat from the tares (tares was, possibly deliberately, an ambiguous alternative name for darnel) external profound religious and political force in the same period, and the Graeco-Roman belief that stress was able to transform wheat or barley into darnel persisted and justified some fundamental customs and laws of Judaeo-Christian culture” (Thomas 197). Although it is believed and understood that wheat cannot turn into weed, Jesus' message in the parable of the weeds implies that weeds can ruin wheat in the sense that false disciples or savage wolves in the church can influence and turn wheat, a true disciple, into a bad one? The parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) found in Matthew 13:24–30 emphasizes the distinctions between wheat and weeds. It becomes evident that wheat and weeds coexist in the field as the plants mature. Interestingly enough, many read this parable with two different valid interpretations, but is it what Jesus was trying to say?

Scholars and theologians have offered two different interpretations of this parable. According to the first interpretation, the parable depicts an apocalyptic scenario. According to this interpretation, the wheat represents the good people in the world, and the weeds, represent the bad. The harvest symbolizes the separation of the good from the bad at the end of the world. The second interpretation suggests that the parable refers to the weeds and wheat in the church. According to this interpretation, wheat stands for genuine believers, while weeds represent imposters or false believers. The harvest is a metaphor for God's ultimate judgment when the true believers will be distinguished from the unbelievers. I believe that these two interpretations are true and that they both equally relate to the meaning of this parable and the meaning that Jesus wanted to portray when saying this parable. Despite the variations in interpretation, both perspectives have the same separation-related idea, where the good will be distinguished from the bad. Both views strongly emphasize leading a good life and having sincere faith, both of which are necessary for doing well in the final judgment. Overall, despite the fact that both interpretations of the parable are slightly different, both provide significant lessons for believers to consider in their everyday lives.

The apocalyptic scenario of the parable also referred to as the Universalist interpretation, is seen as the wheat representing the children of God and the weeds representing the children of the evil one. As Schneiders mentioned, Jesus interprets the parable as "the field is the world; the sower of the good seed is the Son of Man, the wheat is the children of God's reign. The sower of the bad seed is the devil, and his crop are the children of the devil. The harvest is the eschaton, the close of the age; the reapers are the angels of God who will gather the weeds for the fire." (Schneiders 258). This interpretation seems to fit the parable in a way that Jesus introduced the parable in how the kingdom of heaven is compared to wheat and the weed in that only the wheat

will be set apart to go to heaven, mentioned in the interpretation in Matthew 13:36-43. The devil will interfere with God's children entering heaven, which is why the enemy sowed weeds, the children of the devil. As mentioned in McIver's article, he states, "A God's reign is universal, the church's proclamation takes place on a worldwide basis, and the children of the kingdom are found scattered throughout it. The devil also works with a world with a wide scope, and his "crop" is called the children of evil one" (McIver 644). The wheat and the weed are also represented as the believers and the non-believers who will be separated at the end of the world or the day of judgment. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to this parable, implying that only the children of God, the wheat, will enter the kingdom of heaven, hence when it says, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."(Matt. 13:30 NIV) the barn representing the kingdom of heaven and the weeds, the non-believers, being burn representing hell. The parable distinctly states how the good and the bad will be separated at the time of judgment, that time of the harvest. So, this parable must be directed to the whole world.

Many believe that the universal interpretation of the parable may have its weaknesses. As Schneiders states, "This world is one reality in which good and evil are pervasively and intimately intertwined. Every person, every institution, every system whether intellectual, political, economic, educational, or even religious, is a complex reality in which good and evil struggle for dominance. And that struggle goes on from the time of planting till the time of harvesting, throughout the whole of history." (Schneiders 258). Although what Schneider states is true, we have to understand that when it says "When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared" (Matt13:26 NIV), this may be interpreted as the Ecclesiastical interpretation, the weeds, and wheat in the church. McIver states how in the parable, "The weeds

were not recognized until the crop matured....On a universalistic reading, does this mean that the children of the kingdom cannot be easily distinguished from their pagan neighbors?" (McIver 647). If this parable is related to the whole universe, why are the believers and non-believers not easily differentiated? This shows how this parable may be referred to the church community in that there may be weeds among the wheat.

Many scholars and commentaries view this parable as an ecclesiastical interpretation. Jesus told this parable of the weeds as a comparison to Christian society. In a Christian society, Christians go to church and engage with others believers. There will be true faith believers, and then there will be believers pretending and being bad influences to others in the church. For example, as Jesus told this parable of the need for wheat and weeds to grow together, the Apostle Paul said to be careful of them in Acts 20:28-30. "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30 NIV). This shows how there will be disruption and dressed-up Christians in the church to disrupt the true believers from growing in God, relating to the weeds growing with the wheat. The enemy wants to disrupt the children of God, and the enemy does this by dressing just like the Christians to destroy them. We see that in MacArthur's Commentary says that "Here it pictures Satan's efforts to deceive the church by mingling his children with God's, in some cases making it impossible for believers to discern the true from false." (MacArthur 1149). As the enemy plants his weed at night, so does the enemy plant and confuses the community of faith and those Christians who are not being prudent and watchful of their salvation and walk with God.

McIver makes a great point in that in the parable of Matthew 13:23, the interpretation of the parable is directed to the disciples, not the crowd, implying that the parable belongs to the followers of Jesus (McIver 650). Not only this, he mentions how the parable is explained in terms of the community of faith. For example, McIver mentions, "This community is faced with the dilemma of what should be done about evil members. Just as the bearded darnel could not be initially distinguished from the wheat, these members are also hard to distinguish from other disciples of Jesus. Yet their fruitage appears to be evil." (McIver 649). This makes sense in the reason why the slaves came to the master wanting to gather and get rid of the weeds. True believers, the wheat does not want to be disrupted by the weeds, the false teachers. In the article *The Glimpse of the Kingdom*, Witherup mentions, "The parable thus becomes an image of the faith community. There are both good and bad members in the Church. But one cannot divide them so easily in the present age." (Witherup 47). This parable also relates to the ten virgins as Witherup mentions, "It warns of the need to be prepared for the kingdom when it comes. One never knows at what hour of the day or night it will arrive." (Witherup 47). In the church, false teachers will want to gather faithful believers into their false doctrine, just like the weeds want to disrupt wheat to grow faithfully alone. The wheat is the one that will be brought to the barn, unlike the weeds, just like those five foolish virgins who were not prepared and did not go with the bridegroom but left outside.

When interpreting this parable from the community of the church, we may think that the parable indicated predestination of whether some people are weeds and others are wheat, which is not true. Marten states in his article *People, not Plants*, "The point of Jesus' parable is not that some people are made evil from the beginning, in their roots, but that the church is a *corpus mixtum* of sinners and saints." (Martens 46). The church will be mixed with sinners and saints,

and Jesus even said to be careful of false teachers in Matthew 24:24, “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matt 24:24 NIV). In light of the potential for the misunderstanding caused by false instructors and false believers, this parable points out the value of discernment within the Christian community. It also emphasizes the fact that there will always be true believers and imposters in the church, but in the end, God will sort out the good from the bad.

One may ask why the master would wait to pull out the weed and let it grow with the wheat in the parable. This goes hand in hand with the community of faith. As Waters says, “The reason God waits to burn the weeds is to protect the wheat as it grows. When we recognize the weeds as harmful, destructive entities, we too have an obligation to prevent them from choking off the potential of the good seed God has planted.” (Waters 59). Weeds grow entangled with the wheat, and ripping off the weeds will also rip off the good wheat. This shows how many in the church as weeds may get attached to wheat, influencing them into false doctrine and toxic traits, which eventually the wheat will be more weed than wheat. In the church, Jesus said there would be false teachers and savage wolves among his believers, and the reason God waits for the time of judgment as well is because He wants to see who are the true believers, the true wheat that did not tolerate or get persuaded from the bad weed. “While the parable of the weeds looks forward to a final judgment day, it has implications for how we build up the kingdom in our present circumstances. As we work toward a society in which all people are treated with dignity and respect, we will have to contend with the weeds that choke justice, literally and figuratively.” (Water 59).

When comparing the wheat and the weeds to believers in the church and false teachers, we have to remember that Jesus warns his disciples of sinners among the believers in the

community of faith. This is warned by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 and as McIver mentions, “While the parable of the weeds among the wheat seems to imply that the community simply put up with the problem of evil in its midsts, in 18:15-17 it appears that there are some matters so serious that after due process the community will act against those individuals. Yet this apparent contradiction further serves to show that the issue of what to do with unworthy members of the community is a live one in the gospel.” (McIver 649). God warned us about having difficulty in the church, and the wheat and weeds are an example of that. The devil will plant weeds among the church capturing wheat in the process. Interestingly Bergant mentions that “Dishonorable people have often been thought to be righteous, while the truly righteous have been overlooked. Furthermore, there is always the possibility of conversion. In the meantime, we belong to a church that is an assemblage of sinners, ourselves among them.” (Bergant 31). The possibility of conversion in those that are weeds is found in the Gospel in Matthew 7:21-23. “The false prophets of 7:21-23 share two characteristics with those represented with those by the weeds of 13:24-30,41: they were distinguishable from other Christians in that they worked miracles in the name of the Lord, yet at the same time they were “evildoers,” (McIver 649). There are several themes and parables that capture the ecclesiastical view of the wheat and the weeds, like the parable of the net, the wedding garment, the ten virgins, etc.

The church, the body of believers, may learn a lot from the parable of the wheat and the weeds found in Matthew 13:24–30. In this parable, Jesus says that the world is represented by the field, and Jesus himself is symbolized by the man sowing the good seed. The sons of the kingdom, those who accept the message of God and obey Jesus, are referred to as the "good seed." However, by introducing false teachers and false believers, weeds that may look like wheat but are actually weeds, among the sons of the kingdom, the enemy, who is the devil, will

attempt to cause chaos. In light of the potential for misunderstanding and strife caused by false instructors and false believers, this parable underscores the value of discernment within the Christian community. It also emphasizes the fact that there will always be genuine believers and imposters in the church, but in the end, God will sort out the good from the bad. In general, the parable exhorts followers of Jesus to continue being obedient to him and to watch out for false teachers and imposters. This is why I believe this parable is towards the Christian community rather than the whole world.

The message of Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds, which appears in the Gospel of Matthew, is that it takes time and faith to discern between right and wrong in the world. The weeds represent individuals who have strayed from God's path, while the wheat represents those who are obedient to Him. Despite the differences in the interpretation of scholars and many commentaries, both views share a common theme of separation, where the good will be separated from the bad. Both interpretations also stress the importance of living a righteous life and having a true faith, which is essential for a positive outcome in the final judgment. Although both interpretations of the story are slightly different, both provide significant lessons for believers to consider in their everyday lives. We should put our faith in God's plan for separating the good from the bad on the Day of Judgment. It inspires us to uphold our beliefs and carry on doing good deeds in the world because we know our efforts will be rewarded.

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