

A Parable for "Tarable" Times **Matthew 13:24-43**

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You can see from my title, I either have a typo or Pastor Steve is trying to be clever. It is the latter. "Tarable" is spelled this way because we are looking at Jesus' parable known as the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (at least it is in the KJV).

It is also tarable because Jesus told this parable in pretty terrible times. Israel was under occupation. Taxes were exorbitant. Corruption was everywhere. Tax collectors took payments under the table. Politicians were crooked and didn't rise to power because of their perfect Sunday School attendance. In just a few years Israel would be sacked and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed. These were perilous times. Tarable times. The tares seemed to be winning.

But there was this young Jewish rabbi walking around saying that the kingdom of God was at hand. Everywhere he went he told about God's kingdom and what it was like. Often he talked about it using stories that had the real truth encrypted into a simple narrative. They were called parables. 'Parable' in the Greek is two words mashed together. The first word is *para* which means 'alongside;' *ballo* means 'to cast.' So a *parabalo* or parable is a 'narrative or illustration that casts one truth alongside another.'

Why would Jesus teach this way? Because it allowed him to encrypt spiritual truth in a way that those who were given understanding by God could understand it and those who were not enabled did not understand it. Here is Jesus giving the reason behind parables.

"Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' And 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. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'"
(Matthew 13:11-13 ESV)

Some would understand them and some would not. For example, they sounded like fairy tales of nonsense to the Pharisees. They couldn't understand the meaning. Others, like the disciples in today's parable, continued to press toward understanding. I would further add, when it comes to interpreting parables, people chronically apply truths from parables that Jesus never intended. That's dangerous. Generally, there is one primary truth a parable is communicating. Look for that one. Don't apply every nuance of the story or try to squeeze meaning out of it that Jesus never put into it. Today's parable is much easier because it is one of the rare ones that Jesus tells and interprets for us.

The modern English translations call this the parable of the wheat and the weeds. They translate it that way for several reasons but I won't get into the weeds on that. Like going to a musical or play, they give you a program that lists the cast of characters. Let's do the same here.

The Cast

- *The Owner of the Field*
- *The Seed (good)*
- *The Enemy*
- *The Seed (bad)*
- *The Owner's Servants*

"He put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:24-30)

Did you get the story? This would have made total sense in the agricultural society of that day. A man went out in his field to plant seed. Don't think John Deere tractor and planter. They just spread the seed from a pouch they carried. Before it was covered over, an enemy snuck out at night and scattered a different seed. It was not wheat, but a weed—a specific kind of weed called darnel. You must know about this plant for the story to make sense. Darnel is a weed, but it looks very similar to wheat, especially when it is young (see below).



The wheat is on the left; darnel is on the right. Darnel has a poisonous fungus on it so it was not just a nemesis, it was deadly. It could make a whole field worthless. It's kind of like E.coli in a processing plant that can contaminate a whole inventory. It was so serious that there was a Roman law against sowing darnel in a field.

As you can see, darnel looked like wheat. The only difference was that at its final stage of maturity, it turned black and could easily be discerned from grain.

So the owner plants the wheat. The enemy comes in the night and nobody realizes darnel seed is there. Time passes. They realize there is this poisonous weed amid the wheat! The servants suggest pulling out the darnel. Ever pull up fresh sod? The whole roll comes up. Grass roots intertwine. To pull out the darnel would mean pulling out the good wheat as

well. What should they do? The solution was to wait until harvest. The darnel is easily seen then and can be cut and burned. The wheat crop is saved and harvested into the barn of the owner.

That's the parable. Did you get it? Neither did the disciples. Jesus gets done with his teaching and they all head into the house and the disciples are still pondering.

"Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.'" (Matthew 13:36-39)

The Cast Unveiled

The Sower	Son of Man (Jesus Himself)
Field	World
Good Seed	Sons of the Kingdom
Darnel	Sons of the Evil One
Enemy	Devil
Harvest	End of Time
Harvesters	Angels

"Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end 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, 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. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:40-43)

So what is Jesus doing? He is essentially telling the whole redemptive story. God is the owner who had a field: creation. The enemy Satan introduces sin into the field contaminating the field and the crop. What was supposed to be a field of good seed and good plants became a field of bad seed and bad plants. Sin and sinners fill God's creation. God is patiently waiting until harvest time when he will throw the weeds into hell. Those who are righteous will be brought into God's eternal blessing, "the kingdom of their Father." Creation. Fall. Redemption. Consummation. This is the story of everything in one parable. But what is Jesus teaching specifically?

The Exclusive Nature of the Gospel

A few of Jesus' parables divide humanity into two groups. Here it is the wheat and the weeds. Others include the good fish and the bad fish (Matthew 13:47ff), and the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31ff). These parables are troubling because when it comes to salvation, you either are saved or you aren't. You are either a wheat or a weed. A sheep or a goat. One or the other.

What separates them? Not their humanity. Not their sinfulness. Not their needs. All humans are equally sinful and guilty before a holy God. What separates them is whether they are a true follower of Jesus and under his grace or not. Nobody is slowly moving from one side to the other. Wheat or weed. Period.

- *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter*

against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." (Matthew 10:34-36)

- *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6)*

Our society chafes at any claim of exclusive truth. Of only one way. Or imagine many ways to God and whatever way you want is good. I have had people tell me that they have their own religion. They just do their own thing, as long as they are sincere, etc.

Jesus blows all that away and says, there are two types of people. Wheat or weeds. Sheep or goats. Saved from the wrath of God and those who remain under his wrath forever. For now, in the world, everyone is intermingled and can appear to be on the same footing. Eternity will be much, much different.

The Patience of God and the Damnation of the Wicked

"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." (Matthew 13:41-42)

Whenever we talk about eternal judgment we must do so with soberness. Reality is that right now there are billions of people who once were alive like you and me who are currently experiencing conscious punishment. They, along with all those currently living, are awaiting the final judgment that this parable describes.

<i>When</i>	<i>At the end of the age</i>
<i>What</i>	<i>The great "weeding"</i>
<i>Who</i>	<i>Everything that causes sin and all who do evil</i>
<i>Where</i>	<i>Fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth</i>

Jesus is telling the disciples that there is a period of waiting. During this time, wheat and weeds, righteous and unrighteous, are all together in the field. Remember, the field is the kingdom of God. The world. It is not the church, even though many people interpret it this way. It's the world including the church. The righteous live and work and play right next to the unrighteous. In many respects, they look and act and talk the same. But don't be misled. One day, everyone will be separated. The righteous will "shine" in the sun. That's what healthy grain does.

But the unrighteous? The language could hardly be any more sobering. They will be thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The word for gnashing is used seven times exclusively by Jesus. It denotes extreme anguish and utter despair. It means to snarl or to growl.

Perhaps you've never heard that this is the eternal destination for anyone who dies without Jesus as their Savior. Without the grace of God. Without saving faith. Without eternal life. Charles Spurgeon speaks on the moment of death for the unbeliever:

"And now you feel that you are expiring. Your soul is filled with terror. Black horrors and thick darkness gather round you. Your eyestrings break. Your flesh and your heart fail. But there is no kind angel to whisper, 'Peace, be still.' No convoy of cherubim to bear your soul away straight to yonder worlds of joy. You feel that the dart of death is a poisoned dart, that it has injected hell into your veins; that you

have begun to feel the wrath of God before you enter upon the state where you shall feel it to the full.” (C.H. Spurgeon, Sermons of the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon of London, pp. 139-140.)

Looking at the field right now, that sounds crazy. But as the Rev. Richard Baxter said, “*We must not misinterpret God’s patience with the ungodly.*” (Rev. Richard Baxter, *A Paraphrase on the New Testament*, p. 35) We must view sin as God does and let the terror of divine wrath make us serious about life, death, and eternity. Perhaps to lead you to trust in Jesus and to receive the forgiveness that alone keeps us from such a terrible eternity. And we must always remember the amazing thing that God is in the practice of turning darnel into wheat. And that is us, if we are true believers.

In the End, the King Wins

Satan is the enemy in the story. Satan has tried to thwart God’s plan from the beginning.

- In heaven
- In the Garden of Eden
- In the desert temptation
- In the Garden of Gethsemane
- On the cross
- In the church

Despite the efforts of man, the efforts of Satan, and all the forces of evil of this world arrayed against him, God’s plan will be accomplished. He will redeem a people unto his own, and his kingdom will be established forever and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Why is this comforting? Because for now the world is mixed. Good and evil coexist. In fact, at times it’s hard to tell the difference between them. We live in this time of tension between how things appear today and what the Bible says it will be like some day. Let’s face it, there are many times we think, *what is the deal?* We cry out to God, “How long O Lord?”

What frustration do you have? What impossible circumstance do you find yourself in? What hopeless situation is your family facing? Fear not believer! Despite the onslaught of Satan himself, the kingdom of God will advance, it will overcome, and God will win. The gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Anyone have a DVR? Have you ever recorded a ball game only to have someone tell you who won? It totally changes the way you watch the game. The Cubs made the World Series. Your daughter happens to be getting married during Game 7. It’s the only way you would miss that game. At the reception someone says, “Cubs win! Cubs win!”

You get home and you decide to watch it anyway. They are down two in the first inning. They are down four in the second. They are down eight in the third. Are you sweating? Are you scared? They are down 10 in the fourth and 12 in the fifth. Are you worried yet? Are you terrorized yet? No. Why? You already know the final score.

In spite of wickedness all around us and corruption in government and immoral and violent behavior promoted and celebrated, and in spite of personal tragedies and struggles and trials of every kind, we know who wins in the end. The King wins and with him all those in his kingdom. “*Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*” (2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV) Jesus will win and if he is your King, your future is victory with him.

*"And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still.
His Kingdom is forever." (Martin Luther, A Mighty Fortress is Our God)*

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