

GOOD SEED OR WEED

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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8:12-25

Let me see a show of hands. How many of you would prefer to be a grain of wheat rather than a weed? In all fairness, is there anyone here this morning who would prefer to be a weed rather than a grain of wheat? The way that this parable is told, we are left with the impression that a person will be either a grain of wheat or a weed, but no one can switch between the two, and certainly, no one can be both at the same time.

So, what constitutes the good seed that produces the grains of wheat? According to Jesus' explanation, they are the children of God—those who, according to the Apostle Paul, are led by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, the weeds are the children of the evil one who live according to the flesh. As cut-and-dry as these two distinctions may seem, reality informs us that every human being constantly wavers between living according to the Spirit of God as a grain of wheat, and living according to the flesh as a simple weed. One moment we could be behaving as children of God, and in another moment, we could be acting as if we were children of the evil one, especially when we consider all of our sins of omission.

Naturally, all of us would prefer to be gathered as wheat into the barn at the end of the age. However, what if the end of the age comes when we are behaving like children of the evil one? Will any of our prior good fruit count towards making sure that we will end up in the barn? Perhaps the angels will have to take into account all of the time that we behaved like wheat in our lives and hope that it is more than all of the time that we acted like weeds, and enough to save us.

I will be the first to admit that this whole idea about being gathered into a barn or being burned up in a fiery furnace probably is one of the more challenging concepts in the Bible for us to comprehend. As far as I know, throughout the ages, people have honed in on the weeds that were being collected, bound into bundles, and burned in the fiery furnace as a description of being cast into hell at the end of the age, whatever this age may be. However, is Jesus really talking about hell or heaven in this parable, or do some people just have to read heaven and hell into this text in order to cast a spell of fear into all of those whom they want to behave in a certain way? No, I am not convinced that the main point of this parable is about the promise of heaven or the threat of hell.

I am more convinced that Jesus is telling this parable in order to convey to the people in the crowd that in this life, people are going to have the opportunity to live in the reign of God that Jesus came to introduce and establish only to find themselves surrounded by others in the reign of God who appear at first to be faithful members of God's reign until it becomes obvious that they are more interested in living according to the flesh than living according to the Spirit of God. However, even when the weeds become recognizable, they cannot be pulled up, because their roots are so intertwined with the roots of the wheat that pulling up the weeds too early could also uproot the wheat and destroy the wheat before the wheat has the opportunity to shine like the sun in the reign of God.

Everyone in the crowd to whom Jesus is speaking knows that there is a rivalry going on between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day. They both are claiming that they are the sowers of good seed. In fact, the religious leaders already have tried to discredit Jesus by accusing him publicly of being a child of the evil one. However, Jesus also is intent on exposing the deceitful wiles of the religious leaders. He does so later in the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus publicly expresses his anguish for the religious leaders and claims that they lock people out of the reign of God by making a new convert to Judaism twice as much a child of hell as they themselves are.

Jesus basically is giving the people in the crowd a choice. Both Jesus and the religious leaders have their roots grounded in the same soil of Judaism. However, as they both continue in their respective ministries, it will become apparent to the people that one of them will be the good seed of God's reign, and the other one will be the weed sown by the evil one in God's reign. Anyone who decides to listen to Jesus and follow in his way will shine like the sun in God's reign on earth, whereas anyone who decides to remain in bondage to the laws of the religious leaders is going to end up with a life of misery and anguish.

Jesus has come to set the people free from all of the regulations, requirements, restrictions, taxations, and burdens that the religious leaders have imposed upon the people under the guise of being concerned about the people's eternal well-being. As long as the people continue to choose to try to comply with all of these laws, they always will be weeping and gnashing their teeth because of their failure to do so. In this regard, the religious leaders of Jesus' day have made life for the people a living hell.

Jesus introduces to the people an alternative to this way of life. Drawing upon the best of his religious roots, Jesus proclaims the good news of God's reign and

reveals to the people how they can live in this reign of God and shine like the sun just as Jesus currently is shining in their lives as he lives according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh. He wants everyone to be filled with this Spirit, even the religious leaders of his day, if only they would allow the good seed that Jesus has to sow to be planted and grow in their lives.

However, even if the religious leaders refuse to become good seed and insist upon being the weeds that try to kill the fruit of Jesus' ministry, in the reign of God that Jesus proclaims and reveals, these religious leaders will be allowed to continue in their own ministry in the hope that one day soon they also will see the light and be able to shine like the sun as any righteous person in the reign of God. Until that day, the religious leaders and all who fall prey to their heavy burdens will experience a living hell, the likes of which Jesus would desire for no one.

Today, we are faced with a choice similar to the one that Jesus presented to the crowd of his day—to choose to follow in the way of Jesus or to be bound by all of the pressures and demands of our religious institutions that tell us how to be good when, in fact, we actually are being advised to do that which is evil in the sight of God. For example, when religious leaders tell their people that all of their affluence and extravagant possessions are evidence of God's will and blessing, the weeds are being sown once again. When religious leaders tell their people that they can kill other children of God in the name of Jesus, the weeds are being sown once again. When religious leaders tell their people that the primary purpose of Jesus has nothing to do with justice and peace in all the earth, the weeds are being sown once again. When religious leaders tell their people that the salvation that Jesus desires for all flesh only involves going to heaven after they die, the weeds are being sown once again that will result in this creation groaning in travail and all human beings suffering a living hell.

Jesus came to plant the good seed of love, justice, peace, and freedom for all people, so that the whole creation no longer would have to suffer and groan in pain as the result of human pride, greed, fear, or hostility. Jesus came to fill us with the first fruits of the Spirit of God, so that the whole creation would be set free from the bondage to human sin and be saved from the sinful and evil ways of humankind. Jesus came to make all of humanity right with God in every way, so that we might shine like the sun and the whole creation would be free to give glory to God.

God's creation has been in existence for billions of years, and probably will be around for many more billions of years. However, we human beings are the first

species with the capability of destroying life on this planet and making this planet a living hell for all who live here. If that day ever comes, no one will escape the sin of all of those who do evil in the sight of God. Jesus came into this world to counter this human enterprise and demise by proclaiming the good news of God's reign on earth—a reign in which love, justice, peace and freedom abound. We give thanks for Jesus' testimony and witness, and pray that we are not too late in bearing witness to Jesus' vision and hope for the salvation of this world. As we live into this reality of God's salvation, may the peace of God that goes beyond all of our human understanding, keep our hearts and our minds faithful unto Jesus, our Christ, now and forevermore. Amen.