

Parables: Jesus the Storyteller


Part 2: The Wheat and the Tares

TALKING POINTS WALKING POINTS

Leaders' Guide

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Discussion & Reflection

1. Wikipedia defines a "conspiracy theory" as **a theory that rejects the standard explanation for an event and instead credits a covert group or organization with carrying out a secret plot.**
Tell about a conspiracy theory you **don't** believe. What is a conspiracy theory that you **do** believe?
2. Now, read Matthew 13:24-25 & 36-39a for an account of an **actual** conspiracy!
What alternate narrative(s) have you heard for explaining the existence of evil in the world today?
3. How does Jesus' explanation **best account for** the world as we know it today?
4. Now read Matthew 13:39b-42. What emotional reaction(s) do **you** have to this outcome?
5. How are the tares described in v. 38b & 41b?
Does v. 42 seem to you to be a just response to people such as that? Why or why not?
6. What alternate narrative(s) have you heard regarding what happens after people die?
Why should we believe Jesus' explanation rather than the alternatives? (**Do you?** Why or why not?)
7. The parable ends with "He who has ears, let him hear" (v. 43b). Is that a challenge, an offer, a warning, or what? What do you think are its implications for those who currently are "tares"?
8. 2 Peter 2:7–10 describes righteous Lot's inner turmoil as he lived in a wicked ("tare-filled") world.
Tell about a time when you felt that way as a result of the wickedness and perversion around you.
9. What are the implications of v. 43b ("He who has ears, let him hear.") for the righteous, the "wheat"?
10. Does v. 43a thrill your heart? Why or why not? **Should it?**

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Application-Challenge

What can you do to increase your anticipation for that day?

- Are you confident that you're "wheat" and not a "weed"? Trust Christ today.
- Are you fruitful? Do you evidence the fruit of the Spirit, contentment, humility and joy?
- Are you stable in your faith, realizing that the full kingdom harvest is yet future?

- 1 You should have no difficulty getting folks talking—make sure folks keep their answers **brief!**
- 2 What you're looking for is popular, alternative explanations for the existence of evil in the world. Jesus said that it is the result of a purposeful offensive attack by a rival king, the devil. Today, when folks encounter evil such as a school shooting, what do they blame it on? White supremacy? Mental illness? Economic disparity? Anti-semitism? Right-wing fundamentalism?
- 3
 - Is there anything **morally** wrong, for example, with a coyote eating a duck? So, if we are just highly-evolved animals, there's nothing wrong with a stronger animal killing a weaker. In fact, it doesn't even have to need it for food—a coyote could destroy a whole nest of ducklings, only eating one, and it's just "the law of the jungle". We may think it sad, but it's not morally evil.
 - At the deepest, most philosophical level, "evil" can only be defined vis-a-vis "goodness" (evil is a corruption of, or an attack on, moral goodness). So, if there isn't a righteous kingdom of God, then there cannot be an evil kingdom of Satan. People who do not believe in God and Satan have no rational ground for labeling something as "evil" or being indignant at it. It just "is".
- 4 These verses show God's righteous punishment of evil-doers. A fascinating thing happens in many people's minds: we want justice on a human level (eg. we're glad Harvey Weinstein is in jail and angry that Bill Cosby got out on a technicality), but when it comes to divine justice, we recoil! So, what you're after here is for folks to tell their honest, gut reaction to God punishing evil-doers in hell. [FYI—my hunch on why we applaud human justice but not divine justice is that we don't view **ourselves** as evil people, so when a Weinstein "get's his" we feel as if justice has been done, but when a person who doesn't accept God's forgiveness through Jesus goes to hell, that feels like they got more punishment than they deserved. Romans 3:10-18 describes **all** humanity; we're not nearly as good as we think!]
- 5 This is an extension of the previous question. Whereas 4 asked for their gut (emotional) reaction, this question is asking them to tell **why** they have that reaction. Remember, anger is the correct response to injustice, so those who had strong negative reactions think that something is **unjust** about hell.
- 6 This is similar to 2. The Scriptures give one explanation for the existence of evil, and what will be done to rectify it. Those who reject the biblical narrative regarding evil tend to go in one of two directions: (1) if they believe in "god", they say that everyone (except possibly Hitler) spend eternity with him in bliss, or (2) if they don't believe in the existence of god, they think we just rot and return to the cosmos. **First** get folks answers to the "alternative explanations" question, then ask about their acceptance of Jesus' narrative—and their **honest** reaction to it. Encourage honest communication here—we don't just want "the socially acceptable Sunday School answer"! You genuinely want to know where folks are coming from so that you can pray for them and help them consider the implications of disbelieving Jesus' authority on the subject (no matter how distasteful the concept of hell is to today's sensibilities).
- 7 Just hear what folks have to say on this.
- 8 Read that passage, pointing out Lot's revulsion at the idea of homosexual gang-rape (Genesis 19:4–7). Your goal with this question is to help group members grapple with the reality of wickedness. You may have to "prime the pump" with your own story ("My neice was molested as a child..."). Just share in a sentence or two the event and your reaction to it, and then try to get 1-2 others to share their stories. The point is this: hell appears unjust unless we really believe that humans were created to love one another and that exploitation of others really does deserve punishment.
- 9 Believers should feel relief that justice will one day come, and urgency to share the gospel with the lost.
- 10 Believers **should** thrill at the idea of God's pure, holy, goodness shining brightly through them. If folks are ho-hum about this, explore it (if time permits) or at least make a comment to that effect.
- 11 If folks don't long for righteousness to prevail, remind them that we're not at the mercy of our current emotional reactions. We can **do** something about it. Explore **what** folks can do to grow in this area. (eg. Regular, daily exposure to the Word of God, prayer for a softened heart, and repentance of sin.)

Sermon Summary (Key Text: Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43)

We are in a series where we are looking at some of Jesus' parables. A parable is a story with symbolic meaning. It's a way of saying, "This is like this." That's why Jesus is constantly saying, "The kingdom of God is like..." and then he tells a story. Jesus was a great story-teller! Let's study the parable of the wheat and the tares. This parable has three features: the farmer who sows good seed, the enemy who sows counterfeit seed, and the farmer's call for patience. These features reveal that there are two kingdoms—God's and Satan's—and that there is nothing more important than to know to which kingdom you belong.

In Jesus' day, the Jews wanted nothing more than to be liberated from the oppressive rule of Rome. Over the years many had claimed to be this Savior-king, but all their claims proved false. Then Jesus arrived on the scene and backed up his claims with mighty miracles. But in his teaching Jesus reiterated: "I am not a king like the one you are expecting. I am not bringing a kingdom like the one you are expecting. At least not now." The kingdom Jesus was initiating was more radical and comprehensive than they could imagine—and it was coming "incrementally and gradually." Our problems run much deeper than the present political landscape or prevailing cultural issues. Life has so much misery because all of creation, including mankind, is fallen and we are engaged in a spiritual battle with demonic beings. Imagine a world without sorrow, hatred, grief, poverty, sickness, injustice, strife, loneliness, guilt or family breakdown, a world where brokenness has been completely eliminated because all the opposition to God's love, justice and rule has been eliminated. Imagine a world like that! What Jesus came to do starts in the heart and spreads outward from there. But this transformation happens gradually, like a crop growing. It's a revolution of God's unconditional love and total acceptance. Radical change in our families and communities really is possible right now when God's people sow good seed, but the ultimate harvest is yet future. It awaits the arrival of King Jesus! During the intervening period between sowing and harvesting, between Jesus' first and second coming, there will be many counter-attacks by the Enemy. As a result, there is plenty of conflict in your heart, and in the world. There is plenty of pain, and lots of sorrow. But don't be discouraged, because the day is coming when God will make everything right. But for now, the tares are growing alongside the wheat.

What does it mean to be a Christian in the time period where the kingdom of God is active, but not yet fully activated?

[1] Make Jesus your king. Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we give him first place in our lives. To say anything less reflects a sub-kingdom mentality. Being a Christian means that you seek to serve and obey the One who saved you.

[2] Be patient. It isn't easy, but a mature Christian understands that this present kingdom age is like farming. We realize that we see some success in our spiritual sowing, but we also anticipate the work of the Enemy. We expect opposition. Kingdom ministry always has mixed results.

[3] Be discerning. The enemy has sown weeds among the wheat, so in the church, we find both believers and unbelievers. Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian is a Christian. Some people may look like Christians on the outside—they are moral, decent and religious, but they're not born again! There is no genuine spiritual life within them. Tragically, when Jesus returns, they will discover that they are tares, not wheat. One of Satan's main strategies is to convince people that they are in a right relationship with God, when they are not. A genuine Christian is the product of a miracle. If you think Christianity is a matter of being good enough, then you are just a tare mixed in with the wheat. What distinguishes a genuine Christian from a counterfeit? The answer is spiritual growth and fruit. Are you growing? Do you understand that being a Christian is a God thing, not a personal reformation thing? Are you sure you're a Christian? Might you be a tare instead of wheat? That's a real possibility. You can nail this down right now, by placing your trust in Jesus as your sin bearer. Then, remember that the kingdom of God is like farming. Be patient. Realize that one day, God will fix everything. Until then, don't be spiritually passive. God calls us to engage ourselves fully in his kingdom work by sowing spiritual seeds as broadly as we can. Church, this is the season for sowing so let's be about God's business!

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five Question Bible Study" (see page below) *is a simple way to study any passage. We can use it to discern between the wheat and the weeds...*

Monday—Read 1 John 2:3-6. What is your relationship to God's commandments?

Tuesday—Read 1 John 2:15-19. What is your relationship to the world?

Wednesday—Read 1 John 3:4-10. What is your relationship to righteousness?

Thursday—Read 1 John 3:13-18. What is your relationship with other believers?

Friday—Read 1 John 5:11-13. What is your response to God's testimony?

Saturday—***In preparation for worshipping the risen Lord with your church family,***
study Matthew 18:21-35.

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]