

Kingdom Stories
Week 2: Wheat and Weeds

Looking for more people, families, organizations to pledge \$50 a month to enable **Cultivate** to continue to do the work it is doing. New boss.

Thanks to Matt for doing such a great job kicking off our new series, Kingdom Stories. We are looking at the parables Jesus taught. But really, those **parables are stories about The Kingdom of God/Heaven**. It is called both names throughout scripture. Parables can be dismissed as **cute little stories with a moral**, but **Kingdom Stories are different**. They are stories that talk about what **God is doing and will do**. They are about what Jesus taught about exclusively during the **first couple of years of his ministry**. The Kingdom of God has been one of those parts of Jesus coming to earth that **most evangelical churches have neglected**. They have **boiled it down like this**: Jesus came and died for your sins. If you admit you are wrong and believe in him, you will get to go to heaven and not hell, end of story. Matt taught us last week about the key word that Jesus says in these stories and that is **"listen."** Not listen hyper listen, as if it is life and death. **This, therefore, might be new territory for you, because Jesus is about more than just getting you to heaven.**

Here are a couple of phrases that I think can be helpful as we look at today's parable or Kingdom story.

Kingdom is present reality and future hope...It's already here, but there is still more to come.

The Kingdom is the restoration of God's rule and reign here on earth...over all things.

- Redeeming creation
- Anywhere or anything over which God has authority

It's upside-down and backwards from how people think things are supposed to work—Then and now.

"Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

So why did Jesus teach by using these parables or kingdom stories? **Jesus taught in parables for two reasons.**

- o **To reveal parts of the kingdom that have been hidden.**

34 Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. **35 This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet: "I will speak to you in parables. I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world."** [Mat 13:34-35 NLT]

Many of Jesus' parables were **contrary, confusing, hard to understand**, and made some people angry.

The people in Jesus' time were expecting the **Messiah to bring a political/military kingdom**...To free them from Roman oppression.

The Kingdom of God is **hinted at through the Old Testament** (the **pre-Jesus or build up to Jesus** part of the Bible) there are clues, but it is never laid our **Gospel** definition, we say it this way; "Jesus came to **usher in** the kingdom of God." It's like an usher seating you at a **ball game, theatrical production, or even a wedding.**

This kingdom Jesus speaks of is different than what they expected/hoped for, therefore, it requires explanation. Usually **when you are dreaming of something** that hasn't come yet, the picture you have of it isn't completely accurate.

The parables, or kingdom stories, Jesus told **covered all walks of life**, so **everyone** could **potentially identify** with Jesus' message and mission.

- Masters and servants
- Landowners and tenants
- Businessmen (and women)
- Parents and children
- Rich and poor
- Farmers

Jesus teaches in parables, or kingdom stories, to reveal the parts of the kingdom that have been hidden and also...**To test peoples hearts.**

The purpose of these kingdom stories is to test people's hearts. You stick the **thermometer into the turkey** to see if it is ready to be served. You can't see completely into the middle of the turkey. You'd have to cut it clear through and then **all of the juice would run out**, and you'd have a dry turkey. Jesus tells these stories because it will reveal the state of their hearts. Are they receptive or are they hard, set in their ways?

Jesus is testing the hearts of the crowd to see whose heart is ready for more clarity. You don't need to tell someone why who doesn't want to know why. Who has **the father been preparing** and who wants to know more.

Jesus lays this out for us in what is our theme verse for this series, Matthew 13:10-17. **10 His disciples came and asked him, "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?" 11 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. 12 To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. 13 That is why I use these parables, for they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand. 14 This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. 15 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes--so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.' 16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. [Mat 13:10-17 NLT]**

Jesus says a couple things here that **seem contrary** to His message of **"all are welcome"** and **"it's never too late to turn to God."**

- "For those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them"
- "For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes--so **their eyes cannot see**, and **their ears cannot hear**, and their hearts **cannot understand**, and they **cannot turn to me** and let me heal them."

“God does not force anyone to accept the message of the kingdom, so the crowd’s response to the parables is dictated by the nature of their hearts.” NIV Application Commentary

Jesus does not force anyone to accept His message, but He does force us to make a decision.

- Accept His message, or reject it.
- There is **no middle ground**.
- **There are no Swiss during WW2.**

“As the crowd hears Jesus’ parables, their hearts are tested and they are given an **opportunity to receive God’s divine revelation**. But it will impact each person differently. One person may hear the parable and immediately harden his or her heart against the truth it teaches and turn away from Jesus. Each time he hears and rejects the truth of a parable, his heart is further hardened. Another person will hear the parable and immediately respond to its truth, turn to Jesus, become his disciple, and learn from him. Each time that she hears and responds positively to the truth of a parable, her heart increases in Christlikeness... To reject those truths is to start on the long path to **denial of reality** and a heart that will eventually be hardened beyond the possibility of return.” NIV Application Commentary

If you’ve ever tried to establish a new habit, you already get this on a surface level. You want to eat more veggies, have a more positive attitude, exercise regularly, read at night instead of watching TV...

55 55

- **The more you do (fill in the blank), the easier it is** to continue doing it, be more committed to it, and even to get better at it.
- **It becomes a part of who you are.**
- But every time you say, **“not today, I’ll do it tomorrow,”** it gets harder and harder to implement the change.
- **Before you know it, your commitment** to making a lifestyle or mindset change is a distant memory.
- It never happens.

Jesus is not going to snatch something from someone who is open to, but simply doesn’t understand.

- By using parables, Jesus is **making sure people are serious** about hearing what He has to say.
- It’s a way to **evaluate if the message about the kingdom is taking root and producing fruit** in the people listening.
 - Different soils (from last week)...Watch last week’s sermon for a more complete discussion.

Some people want nothing to do with Jesus and the kingdom. They aren’t necessarily hostile, they were indifferent.

Some people in the crowds were there just to see the “show.”

- **Excited initially**, but shallow roots.

- o Hoping Jesus would **perform a miracle**, heal someone, or cast out a demon.
- o They **weren't really interested in Jesus' message of belief, repentance, and obedience.**

Only today it's not about miracles and healings.

- o It's about a **charismatic speaker**, an **exciting program for kids and youth**, and the "right" worship music (whatever that means...)

When it became clear that no miracle would be performed or they didn't easily and instantly understand what Jesus was talking about, they walked away.

- o The casual hearer **wouldn't be willing to dig deeper to figure out** what Jesus meant.
- o Hardened hearts.
- o **Unwilling or unable (worries and busyness of life interfere) to pursue Jesus** and the work He and His Father were doing in the world.

And the same thing still happens today! Some people will commit to following Jesus, and they are all in and going like gangbusters... **until it gets hard** or the **busyness of life presses** in, at which point they **no longer have time** for Jesus.

This is how we can end up with a hardened heart.

1. We are **unwilling or unable to pursue Jesus and the work He and His Father are doing in the world.**
2. Because the **busyness and cares of life** get in the way.
3. **Every time we say "no thanks" to an invitation to join in kingdom work**, our heart gets a little bit harder.
4. Until eventually we are **no longer able to hear the invitation at all.**

You are here, or on line, today. That means that your heart is at least **open** to what Jesus wants to say about his Kingdom. **Do you have a desire for more of God?** Take heart in that. **Now all you need to do is lean in, accept what you can understand, and trust the King to give you more as you remain open to more.**

With that in mind, let's read the parable...²⁴ Here is another story Jesus told: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. ²⁶ When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. ²⁷ "The farmer's workers went to him and said, 'Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?' ²⁸ "An enemy has done this!" the farmer exclaimed. "'Should we pull out the weeds?' they asked. ²⁹ "'No,' he replied, 'you'll uproot the wheat if you do. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.'" [Mat 13:24-30 NLT]

Seems pretty straightforward...and it is...except it's not...

This doesn't make a lot of sense from an agricultural/gardening perspective.

I don't like gardening. I'd pave the whole thing. **That's what parks are for.** Someone does all the work and I just get to enjoy it. **That's what the produce section at Kroger is for.** Someone does all the work and I get to enjoy. Or if I want to get a little **closer to the source, I can go to the farmers' market.**

But even I know this much, that you do your best to pull the weeds as soon as they come up or it will only get worse.

So in this parable, why would the sower of the wheat tell the workers not to pull the weeds??? Pull the weeds and be done with it! Thwart the plans of the enemy!

But in the spring, everything, weeds and flowers and vegetables can all look kind of like this... [Pics of early plants](#)

In this parable, the weeds and the wheat looked very similar, not just in early stages, but all the way to nearly harvest time. The people listening to Jesus would've known this, farmers knew it would've been difficult to distinguish wheat from weeds. The workers wouldn't be sure if they were pulling up weeds or wheat until harvest, **when the fruit was evident**. Then the weeds could easily be separated out and burned.

A few verses later, **the disciples ask Jesus to explain** and **what does asking for explanation tell you** about their hearts... **36 Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, "Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field." 37 Jesus replied, "The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. 39 The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels. 40 "Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand! [Mat 13:36-43 NLT]**

This is clearly an apocalyptic parable

- Jesus says
- We aren't going to focus on this aspect of the parable as much today
- Story for another day

Recap:

- Farmer = Jesus
- Field = World
- Good seed = Believers
- Weeds = People who don't/won't believe
- Enemy = Devil
- Harvest = End of the world, Jesus' return
- Harvesters = Angels

So Jesus takes the disciples aside (probably **Peter and Andrew's house**, from commentary).

The disciples ask what the parable means, and **He gives a super clear explanation** of what He's talking about.

This is a great example of how the kingdom is **both a present reality and a future hope**.

- **The wheat represents people who are already** part of the kingdom.

- **Doing kingdom work**, joining in what God is doing to redeem creation and restore His rule and reign on the earth.
- At the same time, Jesus speaks of how the kingdom **will be completely restored at the end of the world**
 - o The angels will remove everything that causes people to sin.
 - o They will also separate out the people who do evil.
 - o Those things and people will be separated from the Kingdom of God for all eternity.

Why doesn't He do that for the crowds?

Because he wants to test the people's hearts.

Hardened hearts vs receptive hearts.

For everyone listening, including the disciples for the crowds, **this is a chance to make a choice to follow Jesus or reject Him.**

The fact that the disciples were willing to lean in and ask for an explanation speaks volumes about the state of their hearts. They *want* to know more, even if they don't understand it all

What does that mean for us?

- o **It's not our job to pull the weeds.**

Unlike my garden, where weeds are weeds and wheat is wheat, people with **hardened hearts (the weeds) do have the opportunity** to come to belief in Jesus. The weeds could still turn into wheat! **That's transformation!**

If you were here last week, you heard Matt's testimony about how he spent 27 years of his life as a weed (paraphrase). **People in his life** continued to love him, pour into him, and point him toward Jesus. Finally he gave up control of his life to Jesus, and his hardened heart became soft.

What if we "pull the weeds" too soon??? We don't know how God will work in someone's heart/life in the future. **Who are we to decide who will be wheat and who will be a weed at on Judgment Day?**

Reminds me of something Billy Graham said: **"It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge, and my job to love."**

- o **We're supposed to be interspersed among the weeds.**

Countercultural it's upside down.

- God planned it this way.

Jesus said it would be this way, and modeled it for us.

- **Jesus did not surround himself with the purest, holiest people** He could find...He got his hands dirty.
- He interacted with **“sinners”** and the marginalized members of society. Tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, people who were unclean according to the law, those possessed by demons, the poor and oppressed, Gentiles.
- For example: **Jesus’ call to Matthew**. He was a hated tax collector. Once Matthew left his tax booth to follow Jesus, he invited Jesus to dinner at his house with a bunch of other tax collectors and sinners.

The Pharisees reaction...[Mat 9:11-13 NLT] **11 But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."**

We are called to be like Jesus and to do what He did and that means we need to be out among the weeds.

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples about how we are to be salt and light and yeast in this world.

- **A little bit** of any of those things goes a long way.
 - **A little bit of salt** adds flavor to a dish.
 - **A little bit of light** illuminates an entire room.
 - **A little bit of yeast** causes an entire loaf of bread to rise.

We are to be the fullness of Christ in every nook and cranny, every crack and crevice of our world. We are to be the fullness of Christ even--and especially--among the weeds. [Eph 1:22-23 NIV] **22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

- **Jesus is the head of the church**, His body.
- **Jesus fills everything in every way.**
- We are part of His body.
- **Therefore we are to be filling everything in every way.**

Some of my brothers and sisters in Christ think we should separate ourselves off from people who we don't agree with politically. **They think we should use any means possible to win the cultural war** for the heart of America instead of loving people like Jesus did. **That's way different from why we are to be interspersed in amongst the weeds.**

You can still produce fruit if you're surrounded by weeds.

There were raspberries along the path in northern Michigan near Sleeping Bear Dunes. It was a mess, wild, out of control, no rows, twisted with weeds, small trees etc. But it produced delicious berries that **gave me the strength** to finish one of Robin's favorite trails.

But in the end, the weeds were tossed onto a pile to be disposed of

- There always have been weeds, and always will be until the harvest.

There always have been weeds, in your garden and in this world, and always will be, until the harvest. So if we are **waiting until** we can put ourselves into a position where there are no weeds to be ambassadors of the kingdom, we are missing the point. **We are missing opportunities to be part of how God is bringing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.**

[Eph 2:10 NLT] 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Even though there are a lot of weeds in our world, God's kingdom is fine.

- It is moving forward.
- Remember: **We are ones in whom Christ dwells, and we live in His *unshakeable* kingdom.**

Responding to Jesus' kingdom story

1. Let today's parable be a heart test for you.

The disciples and probably others left the crowd and came into the house to hear more. **Are you going to stay outside with the crowd and say "no thank you" to the invitation Jesus is offering you to join Him in His work in the world?** In other words, are you going to **let your heart be hardened**? Every time you resist Jesus' invitation, **you lose a little bit of "want to"**. Or are you going **to come into the house like the disciples did** and ask Jesus what it would look like for you to be a stalk of wheat among the weeds?

Are you ready to enter into the good works that God planned for you long ago?

2. Ask yourself: Are you trying to avoid the weeds?

We talk about how living a life as a disciple—following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and committing to Jesus' mission—goes against the grain of our culture. **It's countercultural** (I love this term).

- o We should be different in the way we treat others and respond to circumstances we face.

But being a worker in the field where there are both stalks of wheat and weeds growing together is countercultural for a lot of Christians. It's easy to think about building forts and digging moats around them to keep the weeds out and protect our people. **But our symbol is a bridge.** We are to be a bridge and build a bridge. Jesus did not tell us to **separate ourselves and insulate ourselves from the world.**

As Jesus was facing His crucifixion, He prayed for His followers. Not just for those who were with Him in that moment in time. For all believers throughout all of time.

This is what He prayed: [Jhn 17:15 NLT] 15 I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.

Is the idea of being out among the weeds contrary to how you have lived your life? Maybe it's time to start changing that.

- o **Cultivate**, The Open Door, or any of our other Faith Promise partners are a good place to start or just working in public.

3. What will it take for you to listen to and obey Jesus this week?

- **Have you joined a Bridge group?**
- **Are you reading the Bible** so you know what Jesus is expecting of you?
- **What help do you need?**

This message is intended to encourage you and get you fired up about joining Jesus in bringing His kingdom to earth. It is about you; yes, you **making The Kingdom of God present** for others. So let's look at one more scripture that hopefully does that for us:

[Mat 9:35-37 NIV] 35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."

Let's be workers in the fields of the kingdom.