



SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13:24-33, 36-58

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

If I were to criticize the way that many Christians and especially most teaching curricula approach the gospels, it would be that we tend to read segments out of the context of the entire book. Last week, as we looked at the parable of the sower, we saw the split between the disciples, who were taught plainly, and the crowds, who were taught “always in parables.”

Earlier in Matthew, we find the Sermon on the Mount, where, if we read closely, Jesus seems to be specifically teaching the disciples (Matthew 5:1-2). A great deal has happened to those disciples between chapter 7, when the Sermon on the Mount ends, and chapter 13, where we are today. The experiences have been profound and the teachings have grown consistently more challenging.

In chapter 10, Jesus sent out the twelve for a “mission trip.” In Mark’s account of this mission (Mark 6:12-13), we learn that the twelve preached, cast out demons, and healed the sick.

Reading, then, Matthew 13 in this context, we recognize that the disciples had been prepared for the challenging teachings and, eventually, the challenging death of Jesus, by an intensive season of learning at Jesus’ side and ministering in Jesus’ name.

Why were the disciples different from the “general population”? I’d suggest that it is because they acted and lived out what they heard.

Note: Since we are probably still worshipping from afar this week, I have no idea what we’ll do next week. But we’ll do something.

INTRODUCTION

What a difference a week makes. This time last week, we were all making jokes about toilet paper hoarding. This week we have officials discouraging gatherings of more than 50.

Think back to last week’s lesson and the four types of soil. Which type are you? Thinking ahead to this week’s text, are we wheat or weeds? The KJV word for those weeds is specific: “tares.” That’s a particular variety of weed that looks just like wheat until it is mature. This season of challenge will cause some people (weeds) to create problems within the church. It will cause some rootless people to decide that having Sunday mornings free is kind of nice. It will see some people get off into the weeds and allow worries about the things of this world to choke them off.

Our calling is to focus ourselves on the pearl of great price. The rest of this stuff is merely details.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

READ MATTHEW 13:24-33, 36-43

1. Read each of these “parables of the kingdom”: wheat and weeds, mustard seed, and leaven. Why does Jesus compare the kingdom to each of these things?
2. Is it significant that each of the compared items (seeds and yeast) appear to be lifeless but then turn out otherwise?
3. What is the spiritual lesson that we are to draw from each of these parables? How are they similar? How do they differ?
4. As you read the interpretation of the “wheat and weeds” parable (in 13:36-43), what surprises you about what Jesus says?
5. Does this parable suggest that bad seed (children of the evil one) cannot be transformed into good seed (children of the kingdom)? Why or why not?

READ MATTHEW 13:44-50

1. Read these three parables of the kingdom. How are these different from the ones that came before? In what ways do they overlap?
2. Is the “Parable of the Net” basically the same as the “Wheat and Weeds” with different details? If it is different, how?

READ MATTHEW 51-58

1. What does Jesus mean by his statement in 13:52? Does that say anything about our diligence in studying God’s Word?
2. Is it significant that the encounter at Nazareth is placed after these parables? What does this story tell us about these people responding to the kingdom? What sort of soil were they?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Can you identify any people within our church who you suspect of being tares/weeds? What is our proper response to such people? Who is tasked with eliminating them?
2. How highly do you value the kingdom of God? Are you ready to give up everything you have to possess it? What do you find it especially difficult to give up? What have you given up?
3. Matthew 13:51-52 seems to say that we need understanding of the Word *and* an embrace of the kingdom. How do you bring out treasures from your “storeroom”? Which side of this equation needs more work for you?
4. What would you say to those who dismiss Jesus as just “the carpenter’s son” or otherwise minimize Him?

GLOSSARY

Kingdom (Matthew 13:24) The Greek word *basileia* means “kingdom,” but it is not precisely the geographical area defined as a kingdom. Instead it is the royal power that can flow into that space. It is the right or authority to rule over a kingdom.

Weeds (Matthew 13:25) The Greek word here, *zizanion*, identifies a particular plant, which looks like wheat but with black, useless seeds. The KJV word “tares” transferred to a plant more familiar to English readers, a form of vetch. For non-agricultural people, weeds is the most useful term.

Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31) A few years ago, skeptics delighted in discovering a seed smaller than the mustard seed. They utterly missed the point. Similarly, the tiny mustard seed might not be the tallest plant in the garden, but Jesus was not giving a botany lesson. It is tiny and grows to be huge.

Leaven (Matthew 13:33) Leaven can be any raising agent as used in breads. Its appearance here is noteworthy because typically leaven is seen as a negative thing in Biblical imagery. Jesus speaks of the “leaven of the Pharisees” (Matthew 16:6) and leaven is strictly forbidden during Passover. We needn’t overthink this. Instead, Jesus is using a familiar substance to make a point, which happens to differ from other uses of it in the Bible.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Background on Matthew—another one
<http://preachingsource.com/journal/the-background-of-matthew/>
- The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds—J.C. Ryle
<https://www.monergism.com/parable-wheat-and-weeds>
- The Parable of the Weeds—Joshua Watts
<https://joshuawatts.me/2019/03/21/the-parable-of-the-weeds/>
- Study Guide for Matthew 13—David Guzik
https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Mat/Mat-13.cfm