Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ: Many Last week, we were
introduced to the Parables of Jesus and how they are about the establishment,
growth and consummation of the kingdom of God. Jesus also connected his purpose in
using parables to election: those who have been chosen to belong to the kingdom will
understand them; those who do not will not. Jesus explains this in Matthew 13. We also
learned about the Parable of the Lost Coin in Luke 15, where the owner diligently searched
for it, and finding it, she rejoiced with her neighbors. God the Father seeks the one who is
lost, and when he finds him, the angelic host in heaven rejoices with God that this one
sinner repents.

Also in Matthew 13, we find the Parable of the Soils, commonly known as the Parable of
the Sower, where a man sows seed in his field. The seed find themselves in four kinds of
soils. The seed that land on the hard path, rocky soil, and on thorny soil all die. Only those
who land on good soil grow and bear fruit. Jesus explained this parable to his disciples.
This is another picture of the hearers of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Our parable today is a related parable, also in Matthew 13: The Harvest of Good and Bad
Seed, also most commonly known as the Wheat and Tares, or the Wheat and Weeds. Jesus
also explains to his disciples the meaning of this parable, wherein a sower sows good seed in
his field, but an enemy secretly sows bad seed. In his explanation, he divides all humanity
into two groups, the righteous and the wicked, and then explains their eternal destination in
one great harvest.

Our theme today then is, “The Harvest of Good and Bad Seed” under three headings:
first, Good Seed and Good Sower; second, Bad Weeds and Evil Sower; and third, The One
Great Harvest.

Good Seed and Good Sower

Jesus begins his parable just like the others: he compares the kingdom of God to a
common experience of people in his time. The comparative words he uses are related: “may be
compared” and “is like” in verses 31 and 33.

A man who owns a field had his servants sow wheat seed, and then rests for the night. In a
treacherous act, someone sows bad seed during the night. The good and bad seed both sprout
and grow together in the field. After a few months, both of them start bearing grain, and the
servants were shocked to discover the weeds among the wheat.

In his explanation, Jesus says in verses 37-38a, “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.” It is he who is the Sower
sent by God. What is the good seed that he sows? It is the sons of the kingdom. How does the good seed become the sons of the kingdom? It is his gospel, his Word that the Holy Spirit uses to bring sinners to faith and repentance. He opens their eyes, ears and minds to the truths of his Word. They grow into maturity and bear good fruit: plentiful wheat.

The field is the world in verse 38, but the kingdom in verse 41. Is the whole world then the kingdom of Christ? No, God created the world, and it is his own possession. Even though he allows sin to permeate the world, he is still its Sovereign King at all times. In the end, Christ will restore his eternal kingship over the whole world, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15).

The wheat that the Son of Man sowed is also called three things. First, they are called “good.” which means “right” or even “beautiful.” A good tree bears good fruit (Matt 3:10) and good works (Matt 5:16). Good soil produces good grain (Matt 13:8). The good and bad fish are separated by the fisherman (Matt 13:48). God is good, and Jesus himself is the Good Teacher (Luke 18:18-19) and Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

Second, they are “righteous.” The OT wisdom books frequently distinguish between the righteous and the evil. Psalm 1:6, “the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Proverbs 10:16, “The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.” Who are the righteous? They are the ones who have been declared as not guilty by God. They are the ones who do righteousness because they have been declared righteous and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. How are they righteous? Not by doing good, but by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are righteous because through faith, God has counted (imputed) to them the perfect righteousness of Jesus (Rom 3:22; 4:5; 5:19).

They are “sons of the kingdom.” Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God. But the good seed, those who believe in the Son of God, are God’s adopted children, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12; see 1 John 3:1). Christ redeemed us from the law, “so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5). And those who are adopted children of the kingdom are able to call God, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15).

**Bad Weeds and Evil Sower**

In contrast to the good seed are the bad weeds. They were sown in secret and in treachery by an enemy who does industrial sabotage out of greed, envy, hate, revenge, or just plain wickedness. The enemy did his evil work while the owner and his servants were sleeping.

The weeds did not appear immediately after the seeds sprouted, but after at least four months. “So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.” Why did the servants notice the bad weeds right after they sprouted together with the good wheat? In the Middle East, there is a member of the grass family called *darnel* which has a poisonous fungus. Since they look very much like real wheat, the servants would notice them only after the grain heads have formed.
After they saw the weeds, the servants asked the owner if they can pull the weeds out. Good intention, but it would not work. The root system of the weeds are more extensive and stronger than the roots of the wheat. And certainly, the roots of the good and bad seed are so intertwined that pulling up the weeds will surely pull out the wheat as well. The wheat harvest would be ruined. So the owner commanded the servants to wait for the harvest.

In his explanation of this parable, Jesus makes several contrasts between the good seed and bad weeds. First, the one who sows the weeds is the devil, “the evil one.” The “evil one” is the devil who snatches away the seed that the sower sows along the path. Jesus sows the good seed by the saving truths of his Word, but the devil snatches the Word away by blinding the unbeliever. They are then unable and unwilling to see and hear the gospel. The gospel is foolishness and a scandal for them.

Second, while the good seed are called “the sons of the kingdom,” the bad weeds are called “the sons of the evil one.” Jesus greatly offended the Jews when he told them, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (Jn 8:44), and that their followers are “children of hell” like them (Matt 23:15). John again says that “the children of the devil” are those who “[do] not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 Jn 3:10).

Third, while the wheat seed are called “good,” the bad seeds are called “causes of sin.” The Greek word used is skandalon (from where “scandal” comes), which means “temptation sin,” “stumbling block,” or “offense.” They are the ones who offend others and cause them to stumble. They tempt others to do the same sinful things that they do.

Fourth, in contrast to the blessed, righteous man in Psalm 1 who meditates on God’s law day and night, the bad weeds are “law-breakers,” literally, “those who do lawlessness.” They have no regard for God’s laws and commandments in his Word. They pay lip service to God’s saving truths. They have the law written on their conscience, but their conscience is seared, ignoring, ridiculing, and opposing the Bible.

Jesus divides all mankind into two groups: the righteous and the wicked in the sight of God. To which group do you belong? You’re either in one or the other. And there are eternal consequences to which group you belong to.

The One Great Harvest

If there is one great lesson in this parable, it is this: The righteous and the wicked in this world—and even in the church—will grow together, locked in spiritual battle, but in the end, the judgment of God will destroy the wicked. And this is the conclusion of this parable.

Jesus marks a great contrast between the end of these two groups of people. He instructs his servants to wait till the harvest to pull up both the wheat and the weeds. After they had harvested the whole field, the servants “will gather out of his kingdom” all the bad weeds. The weeds that are gathered out of the field are taken away to be burned as fuel for the winter.
The harvest is the end of the age, when the gospel is preached to the whole world and all the elect are called by God. Jesus promised his apostles that he will be with them “to the end of the age” until the church is completed (Matt 28:20). The harvesters are his angels at the end of the age, "he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt 24:31).

After the bad weeds are gathered out and taken away, they are thrown into “the fiery furnace,” hell itself, where they are “burned with fire.” This is the same lake of fire and sulphur where the devil, his angels, and all the bad weeds of the world are thrown into, to be “tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). Jesus also says that those branches who are not connected to him will be “gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. (John 15:6). John the Baptizer prophesied that in the end, “the chaff [Christ] will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12).

In saying that the angels “will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,” Jesus was alluding back to an OT prophecy:

“I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. “I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD (Zeph 1:2-3).

There are also similarities to the language of Daniel 3:6 when Daniel's three friends were thrown into “a burning fiery furnace.” And to Malachi 4:1's reference to the end of the age as “burning like an oven” to “set [all the arrogant and all evildoers] ablaze.”

There are also contrasting allusions to a great harvest at the end of the age. In Joel 3:13, we read of an overflowing harvest of evildoers, “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great” (Joel 3:13). In Revelation 14:15, we read of another great harvest by the Son of Man, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.”

In contrast to the fiery destination of evildoers, Jesus says, “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (verse 43). Again, he is alluding to Daniel's prophesy of the end of the age:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (Dan 12:2-4a).

What do we make of this parable and the related texts in both Old and New Testaments? It is this fact: there is no doubt that there will be ONE great harvest of the righteous and the wicked at the coming of Christ with all his angels. All the people of the earth will be gathered and then separated. All the dead will be resurrected. The righteous
will inherit the kingdom of God, and the wicked will be thrown into the fiery furnace of
hell. If this is what the whole Bible says of Judgment Day, where do we find a one-thousand
year interval between the resurrections and judgments of these two groups of people?
Nowhere, because there is one great harvest.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ: The timing of this one great harvest is important to the
church. The servants of the owner were eager, maybe even impatient, to pull out the
bad weeds before the harvest is ripe. The owner knew what great harm this would be to the
good wheat crop.

In the church, overzealous believers sometimes make hasty judgment on fellow
Christians, without knowing the facts and the different sides of the issue at hand. This
parable shows us that patience and due diligence are needed when confronted by
controversies and arguments. Pastors, elders and deacons have the responsibility of making
sure that issues are thoroughly investigated and discussed. The people are to patiently wait
for the officebearers to finish their inquiries and make a decision. When a decision is made,
the congregation is to submit to the officebearers of the church.

On the other hand, does this mean that even when there are serious problems in church
discipline, the overseers of the church must not take any action until Judgment Day comes?
Of course not! Jesus addresses the process of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17. It must
be conducted in the spirit of love and gentleness, but also in firmness. And the ultimate goal
of discipline is the restoration and forgiveness of the repentant offender.

Weeding out sin from the church also involves discernment. Both the Old and New
Testaments are full of references to those who belong to the covenant community but who
are not true believers in Christ. It might be that in some cases, like the bad weeds, the
church will never find out who the “sons of the evil one” are until Judgment Day. These are
the ones who will say to our Lord on that day, “Lord, Lord,” but he will say to them, “I never
knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt 7:23).

But those who are openly unrepentant, those who do “sexual immorality or greed, or is an
idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler” are to be purged from the church (1 Cor 5:11, 13).

Again, however, this does not mean either that there are good and bad people in the
church. For we are all sinners, and those who are righteous are righteous in Christ alone,
not in themselves. But for the grace and mercy of God, we are all bad weeds, ready to be
gathered out of the church, and thrown into the fiery furnace for eternity.

Let us therefore be thankful that in Christ, we are children of God who will shine like
the sun in the kingdom of Christ forever and ever. AMEN.