

2. The Parable of the Wheat & the Tares

(Matt 13:24-30)

Have you ever wondered why bad things happen in this world? A lot of people think about this question a lot. If God is good, why can things be so bad on earth? If He is so powerful, why doesn't He just fix everything? We know He can do it.

We know that God is good, and when we read about the creation in the book of Genesis, we see that when God creates things, "He saw that it was good." The Bible says it again and again! It says, "God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good." (Gen. 1: 10) and "The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good." (Gen. 1:12). In that first chapter of Genesis, God will see that His creation is good six times. Everything He creates is good.

So if everything God made is good, why are there bad things in the world? And why does God allow them?

It's a complicated and difficult question, and it's hard to answer. People who are philosophers or theologians might write long essays about this problem, and those essays can be full of long words and difficult concepts, and very hard to understand.

But Jesus always talks in a clear and simple way, so when he answers these questions, it's a lot easier to understand, because he teaches in parables. The way Jesus explains it, we can all understand.

In the gospel of St. Matthew, we read that Jesus told a parable, or a story, about growing wheat. The people around him knew about growing wheat. You might have some houseplants or even a garden, and it would be about the same as growing plants or vegetables. Jesus uses the idea we can all understand -- planting things -- to answer a much more complicated problem -- why bad things happen. The story sounds simple, but we will see that it has a bigger meaning.

We call this parable, *The Wheat and the Tares*. So... what are *tares*? If you look up tares in the dictionary, you'll find out that tares are weeds. But they're a very specific kind of weed called a vetch. The interesting thing about vetch is that when it is young and it first starts growing, it looks a lot like wheat! It's hard to tell those two apart when they are first growing, but later when they are fully grown, you would know which was which. And of course, a crop of wheat is a good thing -- but a crop of vetch is just a bunch of weeds. That's not very valuable at all.

So keeping that in mind, let's read the parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’

But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ”

In the parable, the farmer sowed only good wheat seeds. He didn't sow any tares! He planted wheat seeds, and the wheat grew up -- but the tares grew up too!

That's a mystery, right? Who planted tare seeds so that those useless tares would grow right alongside the good wheat? The farmer says, “an enemy has done this!”

God is like this farmer. He has created all of the universe and all the earth, and he saw that it was good. All of it was good. But then, as his creation grows up, we find that there are bad things growing up among the good things -- even though he didn't add anything bad to it! So who did? “An enemy has done this!”

We talked about the Book of Genesis, where God creates the world. That book also tells a story about how Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden, Paradise, and someone told Eve that God was a liar and she should really try some fruit. Do you remember that story? Who was it that came into the garden, which was only full of good things, and tempted Eve to do something bad? It was the Serpent, whom we also call Satan or the Devil, or we call him -- The Enemy!

An enemy has done this!

When we say the Enemy, we mean the devil. In fact, when the disciples asked what this parable meant, Jesus said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil”.

God actually made him good -- he made everything good -- and Satan decided to fight against God, and now he goes around, sowing bad seeds into the world. He kind of plants bad ideas in our heads, like a farmer would plant seeds in the ground!

God has planted all good things, but the Enemy has planted some bad seeds, just like this wheat field! Even though God's creation is good, the Enemy plants bad seeds, so sometimes you get tares in the wheat -- bad things growing right up next to good things!

If you remember, we said that tares are a specific kind of weed called vetch, and when they are young and first sprouting up, they look just like wheat. It's hard to tell which ones are wheat and which ones are tares. We can have trouble telling what things will turn out to be good, and what things will turn out to be bad. We don't always know right away.

So when the people come to tell the farmer that there are tares growing in his wheat field, what do they expect the farmer to do? They must imagine that he is going to weed his fields! He's going to pull up the tares so that only the good wheat will grow. But instead, this farmer makes a strange decision! He decides to leave the tares in his field, and let them grow up next to the wheat. Young tares look so much like young wheat, and he doesn't want to accidentally pull up any wheat with the tares. Every little wheat plant is precious to him, and he wants to make sure that not a single one is lost. So rather than risk pulling up some wheat, he just lets those weeds grow in his field.

This is really the big question of the parable. God creates good things, and then the Enemy adds in some bad things. Why doesn't God just kill all the bad guys? Why doesn't he remove everything bad from this world so that there would be no suffering and no struggles?

Well, just like the farmer loves his wheat, God loves his creation. He loves you. He loves every single good thing he has ever made, and he doesn't want to risk losing something good. You can't always tell the good from the bad, so everything must grow together naturally, and then when the end comes, God will separate the good from the bad.

Jesus explains that this will happen "at the end of this age", at the end of time! As we work our way through the parables, we will learn more about what happens at the end of time, when God does this separating.

For now, we'll finish with this question: in the end, what's the difference between wheat and tares? Remember that this farmer is hoping to feed his family -- can they eat wheat? Sure! But they can't eat tares. Wheat is the kind of plant that produces something. Like a vegetable plant or a fruit plant, or even a flower plant -- we fill our yards and gardens and farms with things plants that produce something. Weeds don't produce anything useful.

That's what God wants for you -- he wants your goodness to shine forth and to produce much fruit!

But keep in mind that you're living in this wheat field -- you're His precious wheat, and you are surrounded by the Enemy's tares! And they are hard to recognize! Tares and wheat look a lot alike, even to us. One of the bad things that weeds do is they choke out the good plants -- the weeds will suck up so much water and they'll grow big and cover the wheat plants, and they take up all the resources! They take the water and the sunlight, and the weeds flourish while the wheat shrivels up. In this world, we are by people who chose to be the Enemy's tares instead of God's wheat, and they can take over. It's our job to be vigilant, to be watchful. We have to pay attention and recognize that there really are people who would lead us astray. We have to be careful about tares, because we are God's precious wheat, and He wants to see us yield beautiful fruit.

What sort of fruit? Well... the fruits of the Spirit are those things that the Holy Spirit can grow inside of you: will grow love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in their hearts. The more you become like Jesus, the more fruitful you are!

QUESTIONS:

This parable is about wheat and something called tares. What exactly are tares??

- *Tares are weeds, a very specific kind of weed called a vetch. When vetch is young, it looks a lot like wheat! It's hard to tell those two apart. But vetch is just a weed, and is not good to eat.*

In the parable, a man planted good seeds in his fields. But what happened when he was asleep?

- *When the man was sleeping, a sneaky enemy planted tares in with the man's good seeds. They were all mixed up together in the ground.*

Why doesn't the farmer in the parable weed his fields?

- *Every wheat plant is important to him, and he does not want to lose any of them, so he lets everything: wheat AND tares grow. At the harvest time, they will be sorted out from each other.*

FOR DISCUSSION:

The farmer in the parable valued his wheat so much that he didn't want to risk losing a single stalk while weeding out the tares that the enemy planted. God loves His creation just like that farmer loves his plants. That means that He loves and values you (and everyone around you), and he doesn't want to risk losing anyone!

Talk together about some of the "bad seeds" that are growing in your life. What are they? Does it ever feel like those bad things will take over your whole life? Talk together about ways that you can keep growing, and how you can be good and fruitful even when the enemy has planted weeds in your way.