

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the weeds among the wheat** in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43. This is a parable concerning TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE IN GOD'S KINGDOM. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Please read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 by yourself, or take turns in the group to read a few verses each.

(S) Matthew 13:24-30 says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 'An enemy did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn'."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that.

What are the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable?

(S) Everywhere in the world people understand how seed is sown on a field with a view to a harvest later. What nobody really expects is that an enemy would be so mean to sow the seeds of weeds among the wheat! That is why the servants are so surprised to discover that there were very weeds springing up among the wheat!

(T) Botanists tell us that this kind of weed is an obnoxious weed, which in its earlier stage of growth, closely resembles wheat. During the early stages of growth, both the weeds and the wheat are still in the blade and *they resemble one another so closely that it is hard to distinguish between them*. Because the workers cannot differentiate between what is wheat and what are weeds, the owner commands them not to go and pull up the weeds, lest they pull up the wheat together with the weeds. The weeds moreover host a fungus that is poisonous both to man and beast. Therefore, the work of the enemy is a contemptible crime.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

The context of the parable may consist of *the setting* and *the explanation or application* of the parable. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the setting is contained in verses 1-9, the story in verses 24-30 and the explanation or application in verses 36-43. Please describe the setting of the parable.

(T) *The setting* of this parable is found in Matthew chapter 13. Jesus teaches seven parables in this chapter: the parables of the sower, the weeds among the wheat, the mustard seed, the yeast, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great value and the dragnet. All seven parables deal with God's kingdom and each parable emphasises another aspect of God's kingdom. Moreover, there is a close connection between the parable of the sower and the parable of the weeds among the wheat. They were probably told to the crowd in close connection with each other and afterwards explained by Jesus to his disciples only.

(S) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

This story may seem to be *an allegory*, because several details in it represent something essential or relevant. However, Matthew 13:24 and 36 call it *a parable*. It therefore has only one main message. The fact that Jesus Christ himself gave several details of this parable a specific meaning does not give Christians the right to assume that parables may be interpreted like allegories! Jesus is the Author of the parables and only he has the right to give to certain details of his parables separate significance. Christians may only interpret those details which reinforce the one main message of each parable!

Jesus Christ did not intend every detail in the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the message of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the parable.

Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

(T) “The owner” is apparently a wealthy farmer, who employs several servants to work his farm, that is, to sow the seed and care for the plants until they are ready for the harvest. Apparently the owner employed other expert reapers during the time of the harvest. Although the Bible tells us that God is the Owner of the world, the explanation does not tell who the owner represents, and therefore this is not a relevant detail in this parable.

(S) “The sower” is a relevant detail (37). Jesus explains that the sower represents *the Son of Man*, that is, Jesus Christ himself. The term “Son of Man” is always used in the New Testament of Jesus Christ only and indicates both his humiliation and exaltation.

(T) “The enemy” is a relevant detail (39). Jesus explains that the enemy represents *the devil*. Without any regard to the work already done, the devil sows weeds *among* the wheat. It is a deliberate act of destruction right amidst the people who are the work of Jesus Christ. The parable describes the devil as operating at night when everybody else is sleeping. The devil works like a thief who does not want to get caught (Jn3:20). Because Jesus does not explain this detail, it is only a part of the story, but not a relevant detail with a specific significance.

(S) “The good seed or wheat” is a relevant detail (38). Jesus explains that the good seed represents *the sons of the kingdom*, that is, the sum total of all genuine Christians in the world. They are those people in whom the seed of the gospel bears good fruit and who profess Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King of their lives. According to verse 43 they are “the righteous”, because they have been justified by faith, and at the second coming of Jesus Christ will shine like the sun in God’s kingdom.

(T) “The weeds” is a relevant detail (38). Jesus explains that the obnoxious weeds represent *the sons of the evil one*. According to verse 41 they are *all who do evil and everything that causes sin*. The weeds include not only evil people, but also evil spirits, evil programmes and evil activities, which are sown among the genuine Christians. Just like the real weeds carry a fungus that is poisonous to man and beast, so these people and activities cause much harm and destruction to the genuine Christians. According to verse 42 the weeds are the wicked that will be thrown into hell. Therefore, the weeds sown among the wheat represent the mingling together of true and false members within the visible Christian Church, Christian organisations and institutions and the mingling together of true and false programmes and activities within them!

(S) “The servants” are not explained by Jesus in his explanation. Nevertheless, in the story of the parable they are important, because the owner forbids them to pull up the weeds from among the wheat before the time of the harvest. Instead, they are commanded to let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the time of the harvest (28-30). Although Jesus does not explain who these servants are, they clearly refer to God’s workers on earth. It is not the task of God’s workers, like the disciples, pastors, preachers, teachers and other Christians to separate the weeds from among the wheat. That will be the task of the harvesters at the time of the harvest!

(T) “The field” is a relevant detail (38). According to Jesus’ own explanation, the field represents *the world* (38). The following three facts must be kept in mind:

First. Jesus does not say that the weeds were sown *alongside* the wheat or *in another field*, but that the weeds were sown *among the wheat in the same field*! Therefore, it is natural to think of the mingling together of true and false Christians within Christian churches and organisations and of the mingling together of true and false programmes and activities in them.

Second. The parable of the weeds among the wheat is also *a secret or mystery*, which Jesus is revealing to his disciples (Mt 13:11). In 1 John 3:12-15, the mingling together of sharply contrasted wicked unbelievers like Cain and righteous believers like Abel can hardly be called a mystery or secret of the kingdom of God. What is far more of a mystery is that within the visible Christian Church and Christian organisations and institutions God allows both true and the merely nominal Christians to dwell side by side. Within the proper boundaries of divinely instituted discipline, Christians must respect this arrangement of God.

Third. At the second coming, Christ will gather *out of his kingdom* everything that seduces people to sin and all people who do lawlessness. The parable does not say that these evil people and evil causes will be plucked “out of the world”, but “*out of God’s kingdom*”! They cannot be gathered *out of his kingdom*, if they were previously not *inside his kingdom*! Thus, it is clear that the mingling together of the wicked among the righteous is within God’s kingdom as it is manifested in the visible Christian Church, organisations and institutions in the present world rather than in the world in general.

(S) “The harvest” is a relevant detail (39). According to Jesus’ own explanation, the harvest represents *the Final Judgement at the end time*, when the separation of the righteous and the unrighteous will take place. According to verse

42 the task of harvesting belongs only to Jesus Christ and he will delegate this responsibility to his angels (Mt 3:12). “The harvesters” is a relevant detail, because Jesus explains that the harvesters represent *his angels* (39). A very important fact to notice is that *the servants cannot distinguish* between the weeds and the wheat *before* the time of the harvest. Another very important fact to notice is that *this distinction between the weeds and the wheat will only become apparent at the time of the harvest*, when the weeds will be separated from the wheat! Only at the time of the harvest will everybody know which people were genuine Christians and which people were not! According to 1 John chapter 3 Christians can distinguish between genuine Christians and non-Christians *within the world in general*. But this distinction is certainly not apparent *within the kingdom of God*, that is, within the visible Christian Church or Christian organisations!

(T) “The kingdom of God” is the most relevant detail in this parable. All the other details describe the kingdom of God in its present form in the world. *The kingdom of God is God’s kingship or sovereign rule in the hearts and lives of people. It manifests itself in their initial salvation and the establishment of the Church on earth. And it finally manifests itself in their complete salvation and the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth.* Here in this parable, Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God *also manifests itself as having two kinds of people within its present scope.*

The kingdom of God is like something happening in this present world, namely, a man sowing good seed in his field and an enemy sowing weeds *among* the good seed. Matthew 24:14 teaches that the gospel of the kingdom is being proclaimed to all the nations in the whole world. And 2 Corinthians 11:1-4 says that the devil and his servants are preaching another message to people in the world in order to deceive them and lead them away from Christ.

However in this parable “the good seed” is not the gospel and “the weeds” is not the false gospel. The good seed and the weeds represent *not messages, but people!* Therefore, “the field” is not the world where both these messages are proclaimed, but is the sphere where both these groups of people are mixed together without us being able to distinguish clearly between them! The weeds represent a group of people who are sown among the genuine Christians in such a way that the genuine Christians are not able to make a clear distinction between them and themselves! That is why the field does not simply represent the world of non-Christians in distinction from the Church of Christians, but rather represents that part of the world in which nominal Christians are mixed together with genuine Christians in a way that is difficult to distinguish. The parable of the weeds among the wheat is thus a symbol of *God’s kingdom in its present earthly manifestation, not of God’s kingdom in its final manifestation.*

The terms “kingdom of God” and “Church” are probably never exact equivalents. “The kingdom of God” in its present concrete manifestation consists of the entire complex of people and spheres, like churches, organisations, institutions, culture, etc., in which Christ’s rule is recognised. And “the Church” is the body of professing believers in Jesus Christ and consists of only people. In view of this distinction it can be said that the reference in the parable of the weeds among the wheat is to the kingdom of God rather than to the Church. But in none of the other parables of Jesus Christ, do the terms “the kingdom of God” and “the Church” approach each other as closely as they do in the parable of the weeds among the wheat and the parable of the dragnet.

(S) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or as in this parable, from the story itself. Like all parable, this parable has only one main message, namely, “the command of Jesus Christ to his servants *before* the harvest-time. Jesus Christ commanded his servants to exercise patience with regard to the intermixture of weeds and wheat until the harvest-time, when he will command his reapers to separate the weeds from the wheat.

The parable of the weeds among the wheat in Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 teaches about *two kinds of people in God’s kingdom.*

The main message of the parable is that “the servants of God in Christian churches and organisations must exercise patience with regard to the intermixture of genuine Christians and nominal Christians in God’s kingdom in its present earthly manifestation.” The parable of the weeds among the wheat emphasises that Christians do not have the task to separate the good Christians from the bad Christians, or the genuine Christians from the hypocritical Christians. Christians and Christian leaders must let them grow and live and function together until at the Judgement Day, when Christ with his angels will sort them out from one another.

“Patience with respect to the nominal Christians” is a fundamental characteristic of God’s kingdom. The workers in God’s kingdom should not be too eager to expel from their company or congregation people who do not belong to Christ’s regular followers, or who have not yet been converted, or who still have some strange immature convictions and behaviour patterns. The workers of God’s kingdom must distinguish between the need to exercise church discipline and the need to show love, mercy and patience to nominal Christians within their midst. They *should exercise church discipline*, that is, they should follow biblical guidelines to warn, rebuke, correct and if necessary ban members out of the Christian Church if they do not repent of their gross sins. But they *should exercise patience* with respect to the

nominal Christians in their church. They should not try to determine who *the good seeds* are and who *the weeds* are within the Church. Instead, they should try to win them to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Christian workers may act on the basis of *known sin* in the lives of Christian, but they may not act *as if they are God and know* who are genuinely born again and who are not. That is the prerogative of Jesus Christ only (Jn 3:3-8).

(T) **POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.**

The teaching in 1 John 3:4-24 contrasts *the children of God* with *the children of the devil* in this present world and teaches that we are able to clearly distinguish between them. But the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50 speaks of the kingdom of God in its present form as catching both good and bad people in its net until they are sorted out on the Final Judgement Day. *It does not contrast the good fishes within the net with the bad fishes still in the sea. No, it rather speaks of good and bad fishes mixed together within the net until the day they are sorted out.* The parable of the dragnet has therefore the same central teaching as the parable of the weeds among the wheat. They both teach that good and bad people are mixed together within the kingdom, within the Church and within Christian organisations until the day they are sorted out and separated from one another.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the seed growing in secret. As preparation, please read Mark 4:26-29.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.