

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

May 23, 2021 | Parable of the Weeds

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- What kind of challenges do you face from living with unbelievers?
- Read Matthew 13:24–30.
- Pray that God would prepare you to live in a world with unbelievers.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

For now, both believers and unbelievers live in the world, but when the kingdom of God arrives, they will be sorted and assigned different fates.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Living in the world with unbelievers presents great challenges but also great opportunity.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Matthew 13:30).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage’s main point to your own life.

Q: *What are some key points to remember when interpreting parables?*

Q: *How can we guard ourselves from overextending the meaning of Jesus's parables?*

Sometimes removing what is unwanted is not feasible because it would adversely affect what remains. When I lived in Northern Ireland, I saw what were known as “row houses.” Instead of every house in the city standing on its own with a yard or driveway separating them, they were built immediately adjacent to one another. Some of them are now getting quite old and being condemned by the government, but they simply stand empty, connected to the other homes. I asked a friend why they didn't just remove these houses from the row to make room for a new construction or just for some space between homes. He said if they did, the houses on either side would cave in. In fact, removing one house would cause a domino effect that would adversely affect several homes on either side. Removing the unwanted home would damage the existing homes too much.

In this lesson, we encounter a parable in which the master of a field does not weed his crops because doing so would remove too much of his grain. At the outset, however, we have to keep the nature of parables in mind. Parables are illustrations of the point the teacher is making. Not every part of the parable corresponds perfectly with the point the teacher is making. For example, the master's servants in this parable are rather inconsequential to Jesus's main point. If the master of the field represents God, then it is possible that the servants correspond to His angels, but this connection does little to advance Jesus's point, which is that God has allowed unbelievers to remain on the earth until the coming of the kingdom of God. Another part of this parable that does not carry over to the point Jesus was making concerns the inability of the master and the servants to remove the weeds from the field. This is an understandable problem for the human characters in the parable, but it certainly does not apply to God. God could, if He willed, easily remove unbelievers from the world.

Q: *What are some examples of situations when removing what is unwanted would cause too much removal of what is wanted?*

Q: *How are these examples like and unlike the parable Jesus gives in Matthew 13:24-30?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus’s parables are a gift to believers. Anyone who thinks the Bible is uninteresting or too hard to understand needs only to be introduced to how the Bible’s central figure, Jesus Christ, taught His followers. We do need to be careful when interpreting Jesus’s parables, however. Demanding that every part of a parable correspond to the overall point Jesus was making will detract from His message and result in some odd theological beliefs. One key to interpreting parables well is to support your observations with other Scriptures. This is not foolproof, but at least it will keep you from going too far off-track when examining Jesus’s wonderful explanations of His kingdom.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Matthew 13:24–30 is a parable about the kingdom of God. This lesson will consider the parable under these broad themes.

1. TWO ROADS DIVERGE
2. LIVING WITH NON-BELIEVERS
3. COMMON GRACE
4. THE GREATER BATTLE
5. JUDGMENT

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate Matthew 13:24–30 in more detail and draw insights concerning how believers will live with unbelievers in the world.*

## 1. TWO ROADS DIVERGE

### ▣ MATTHEW 13:24–30

Q: *What does the master’s field represent?*

Q: *What do the weeds represent?*

This passage provides an excellent illustration of the importance of interpreting the Bible well. Commentators take two different paths when interpreting these verses. Some relate the master's field to the church and the weeds to unbelievers who participate in the church alongside believers. It is not always possible to distinguish between believers and unbelievers within the church because unbelievers give all appearances of belief. This lesson adopts a different approach to this passage which will be further explained as the lesson progresses.

The key to the interpretation outlined above is identifying the kingdom of heaven with the church, but there is a problem with this approach. Matthew consistently distinguishes between the kingdom of heaven and the church. But Jesus was not discussing the make-up of the church. He was comparing the kingdom of heaven with the master's field. The master's field represents the world with both believers and non-believers in it. Once Jesus returns to inaugurate the kingdom of heaven, the wheat and the weeds will be sorted out. The wheat will be harvested and placed in the master's barn, and the weeds will be separated out and burned.

The differences in application further illustrate the importance of interpreting the biblical text rightly. Your interpretation of the Bible significantly alters how you apply it. For instance, the first interpretation would have an obvious application pertaining to church discipline. The church needs to be wary of unbelievers in its midst and should hold members accountable to living lives consistent with the gospel. This application is certainly biblical, but the problem is if this interpretation is not correct, the application does not rightly stem from this passage. Interpreting the biblical text influences how we apply the Bible to our lives.

🔗: *What are some good principles for interpreting the Bible?*

🔗: *Why should you question the biblical interpretations offered by others?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – When considering different interpretations of the Bible, it is important to remember we cannot settle on an interpretation simply because we like it best. We need to look for the interpretation supported by the most evidence. The evidence we look for should include historical information (the historical context of the text), grammatical information (how the words and phrases fit together to convey a message), and theological information (how the main theological beliefs inform your interpretation). Consider doing your own interpretation work for one passage you study in these lessons or one passage you are studying in your church services. Studying Scripture will help your spiritual life, and you will see you are able to gain a lot more from these times when you are learning from others, even if you settled on a different interpretation.

## 2. LIVING WITH NON-BELIEVERS

Q: *What do the weeds in this parable represent?*

Q: *What does the wheat represent?*

The owner of the field sowed it with good seed, but his enemy later sowed weeds throughout the field. The weeds could not be removed without also removing the good seed, so the master of the field decides to allow the weeds to stay until the time of the harvest.

In this parable, the wheat represents believers and the weeds represent unbelievers. God has allowed unbelievers to remain in the world until the day He inaugurates the kingdom of heaven. Then unbelievers will face judgment while believers will enter the kingdom of heaven. But until the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, believers and unbelievers must exist together in the world.

Q: *How should believers seek to live with unbelievers as they wait for the kingdom of heaven to appear?*

Q: *How can believers remain faithful while facing challenges to their faith from unbelievers?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12, Paul writes, “Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” Believers need not always live in strife and contention with unbelievers. Of course, this does not mean that believers should abandon their witness to unbelievers. Furthermore, as Christians live in obedience to their faith in an increasingly secular age, conflicts between believers and unbelievers will become more apparent. Christians, however, do not have to look for conflict with unbelievers.

### 3. COMMON GRACE

Q: *How do the weeds benefit from the wheat?*

Q: *How do unbelievers benefit from living among believers?*

Grace exists in a variety of ways. Christians believe in specific grace, which is what God shows us through Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. When we accept that specific grace, God applies the atonement won by Jesus Christ to our sins so that we may be forgiven.

Christians also believe in common grace, which is a gift from God to every human being. While it does not provide salvation, common grace does allow unbelievers to flourish in unexpected ways. Music and art are examples of common grace. Scientific and medical advances are also examples of common grace. These things are available to everyone and are an indication of God's grace in our lives. In this passage, common grace is illustrated by God's refusal to remove unbelievers before the arrival of the kingdom.

Q: *How should common grace guide our engagement with a secularizing culture?*

Q: *What guidelines should Christians follow to responsibly participate in the cultural production of our society?*

**APPLICATION** – Christians need not assume that everything stemming from non-believers is bad or that everything not explicitly Christian is bad. Common grace is no less a gift from God than the grace that establishes the forgiveness of our sins in the gospel. Since this is the case, we should be eager to embrace the aspects of our culture that are a pure expression of God's common grace. Christians should feel free to enjoy art, athletic events, and movies provided they do not seek to undercut our faith. Of course, unbelievers often abuse common grace

in ways that believers could clearly never affirm. In such cases, believers should abstain from indulging in non-believing culture.

## 4. THE GREATER BATTLE

❓: *How did the weeds get into the field?*

❓: *What does the master's enemy refer to in this parable?*

The master sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy sowed the weeds. That the enemy came while the men were asleep shows his cunning nature. He sought to ruin what the master had done. God's enemy seeks to ruin His good creation through the corruption of His kingdom people. The master's enemy would obviously include Satan, God's arch enemy, but we need not assume this identification to be exclusive. The master's enemy likely represents any and every evil that opposes God and His will.

The inclusion of God's enemies within this parable shows us that there is a greater battle being fought than we often realize. When we meet adversity on earth due to our interactions with unbelievers, this is just one part of the larger battle God is waging against those who would rebel against His authority.

❓: *How can we join God in His struggle against those who would oppose Him?*

❓: *How does knowing God is at war help us when we encounter daily struggles*

**APPLICATION POINT** – This parable reminds us in several ways that there is something bigger going on in the world than we often recognize in our day-to-day existence. We are waiting for the coming of God's kingdom. We witness the ancient struggle against God's authority playing out before us every day. When we encounter struggles, we become so inwardly focused that we rarely stop to think how small our problems are when compared to the

big picture of all God is involved in. This week, when you encounter struggles, try to take a step back and place it into the bigger picture of what God is doing in the universe. It may help you see your struggle as an opportunity to demonstrate God's glory to a world that is in constant opposition to Him.

## 5. JUDGMENT

🕒: *How does the binding and burning of the weeds correlate to God's kingdom?*

🕒: *How does the gathering of the wheat into the barn correlate to God's kingdom?*

The final two elements of this parable are not difficult to understand. Although God has allowed unbelievers to remain on the earth until the arrival of His kingdom, when the kingdom does appear, unbelievers will be subject to judgment. At that point, whatever headway they have made on earth will be for nothing. Every good thing done by means of common grace will be for nothing. The struggle against God's reign will be over.

🕒: *What should be our response to knowing that unbelievers are heading for eternal judgment apart from Jesus Christ?*

🕒: *How does God's judgment add justice to the world?*

**APPLICATION** – Eternal judgment is not something our society readily embraces, but it is the clear teaching of God's Word. Ignoring it will not make it go away. As we encounter God's justice in this parable, we need two responses. First, we need to be ready to share our faith with those who are rebelling against His authority. Second, we must learn to take solace in God's justice. While judgment is hard for us to accept, the prospects of a world in which justice could not be gained is worse.



## NEXT STEPS

Pollsters report that after most general elections most people in our country know few people who voted differently than they did. It is human nature to surround ourselves with people who think and believe and vote like we do. This can present a challenge for us as Christians—we have less access to those who need God the most when we live our lives in an “echo chamber.” Challenge yourself to make a friendship connection with a non-believer this week. Your willingness to do this may change them forever.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

God, guide me through the interpretation and application of your Word. Help me to study your Word daily.

Lord, use me as an instrument to take someone from unbelief to belief.

God, help me to see the world with a wider perspective.

Father, thank you for your justice. I long for the day when I can be gathered to you.

