



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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Matthew 13:24–30; 36–43

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English Standard Version

“Kingdom Wheat, Kingdom Weeds”

The 46th Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled
“The King and His Kingdom!”

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

“He put another parable before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’²⁸ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.³⁰ 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.’” ...

³⁶ Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.”³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand this Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Help us to see that this parable contains profound truths, which can change our lives. Use this parable to cause us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and help us to hear Jesus, and help us to understand Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in Jesus name, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *The Difficult Subject of Spiritual Growth*¹

One of the most difficult subjects to cover is the fact Jesus is constantly telling people to look at yourselves and test yourselves to see whether you're really growing Christians or whether you're just **fooling yourself**. There are so many places where Jesus says this that we **have** to deal with it.

Now personally, I'm always a little bit scared to deal with it. I'll tell you, when I first went to pastor a church in Alabama there were a lot of people who'd been there for many years and there was no real enthusiasm for the gospel and there was very little spiritual life, so I began preaching on spiritual growth. Truth be told, those sermons weren't great. But the purpose was good, God was very gracious to us, and eventually spiritual growth came to many people in that church, but certainly not to everyone. And actually, that's pretty normal in the life of the church — some people seem to **consistently** grow in the faith, while others seem **not to**. And you can't always figure out why or why not. And sometimes it can be pretty frustrating. And yet, it's **a really important issue**. And it's important ... simply because Jesus addresses it ... **a lot**.

Do you know how often Jesus Christ says, "You may be fake? You may be bogus? You may be **counterfeit**?" The Apostle Paul repeatedly says or strongly implies, "Examine yourself to see if you're in the faith."

Jesus says on the last day many people will come to Him on the Day of Judgment and say, **Matthew 7:21-23**, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.*"²² *On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?'*"²³ *And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*"

Now there are all these scary statements in the Bible, and this is one of them, and they tend to make people nervous. They force us to look at ourselves and ask, "Am I really a believer or not?" I'm not quite as prone to preach that way in Northern Virginia, and part of the reason is because in a blue-collar town in the South, even the criminals were members of First Baptist.

1 The Introduction and Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, *The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 1* by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 568-578; *He Spoke In Parables* by Dr. Gordon Keddie, pages 31-40; and *The Parables of Jesus* by Rev. Terry Johnson, pages 161-171; **And the Sermons, "Growth in Christ, part 2" 5/27/90 and "The Wheat and the Weeds: On Reality" 8/9/92, both by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, sermons.redeemer.com; Logos Bible Software 4: *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*; and "The Triumph of the Kingdom" by Dr. Phil Newton, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 10/26/03, www.southwoodsbc.org.**

Everybody had walked the aisle. **Everybody** had given their lives to Christ. **Everybody**, no matter what! And that was rather dangerous.

I'm not as prone to preach on this today because, first of all, I think it's usually a lot clearer in a place like Northern Virginia to know whether you're a Christian or not. I think the lines are drawn more clearly. I think there's plenty of hostility. I think the typical lifestyle in Northern Virginia is so different from the lifestyle outlined in the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments that if you decide to give your life to Christ, you know **immediately** where the lines are drawn. It's just not as true in other places.

That's the reason why I haven't preached this as much, and yet time comes when **the text we're studying** ... and **things happening around us** forces us to look at this teaching. The **reason** we have to look at the teaching is because we do see people around us who look like they're doing well in the Christian faith ... and suddenly they disappear. So we have to explain why that happens.

I mean, haven't you noticed that sometimes there will be people sitting right alongside you in the church — doing well, seeming to come to Christianity, and enjoying it? You watch them, and then all of a sudden they're gone. These are the people who suddenly stop coming to church, stop coming to small group, stop coming to Sunday School, stop coming to Christian activities, they lose interest, and they drift away. Unless you understand something about the teaching of Jesus here, you're going to get pretty disillusioned when someone you like, who seems to be a very fruitful and effective Christian, suddenly disappears.

In other words, somebody who suddenly either **gives up the faith** or goes into a **non-Christian lifestyle** or something like that. People say, "How could that be? How could that happen?" Jesus tells us very clearly in this parable that there are **counterfeits** inside the body of Christ. The parable tells us that there are people who come in, and they look like they're doing very well. They look like Christians in every way, but then they're not. They give up. They let go.

The Apostle John says in **1 John 2:19**, "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*" That's a pretty strong statement! He's saying real Christians **last**; they stay to the end. If they haven't stayed to the end, then no matter how **authentic they looked**, they weren't authentic. That's what he's saying. In today's passage, Jesus' parable tells us there **ARE counterfeits** who actually stay to the end. On the last day, the Day of Judgment, it will be revealed that some of the people who are standing there, in the community of the saints, really aren't saints at all.

Now I'm **not** using the word **saints** in the Roman Catholic sense of super abundantly incredibly wonderful Christians, but in the Biblical sense, which means **any Christians** who have the Spirit of God in them. At the end of time, there will be people who say, "Lord, Lord, didn't we do **this** and **this** and **this** and **this**?" Jesus will say, "**I never knew you.**" Now we have to come to grips with that. We have to! It's in the Bible. It makes us nervous. It makes us scared.

I don't want you to get rattled, I don't want you to say, "Oh my gosh! I wonder if I'm fake too?" The answer is the Word of God tells you. The Word of God gives you guidelines. The fact of the matter is no **counterfeiter** can make counterfeit money that is **so perfect** the experts, who really know what to look for, can't tell the difference. Now, of course, some **counterfeit** money is so good you have to be a real expert. Biblically, any person can be an

expert on real Christianity versus **counterfeit** Christianity by going to the Word of God, so let's go. Let's take a look at what it says.

It's fairly simple. I'm going to give you a fairly simple formula for understanding the difference. The first thing we learn here is **a real Christian is somebody whose heart is transformed by the Word of God**. That's clear. When Jesus was explaining the Parable of the Sower, He said, **Matthew 13:19**, "*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.*" What's the seed? What's the seed that brings about new life? What is it? The word of the kingdom, the gospel, the truth, the Word of God. That's pretty clear.

In fact, you know, there are a lot of places that say we're born of the Spirit, but it also says in **1 Peter 1:23** that "*... you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.*" What makes a Christian a Christian is there's a body of truth that comes in. There's no doubt that being a Christian is more than doctrine. Being a real Christian is **more** than just knowing and understanding doctrine, **but it's not less**.

There are a couple of basics you have to believe — you must know and believe that there's a God who's both a good Father and a holy God who demands justice. You have to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who did something on the cross that dealt with our sins. You have to believe the Spirit of God can come into your life and completely regenerate you. You have to believe that's all received by faith, not by works.

Those are very, very basic, but you can't go **beneath** them. You can't **reduce** Christianity below that. Christianity is certainly **more** than that, but it's not **less** than that. There's a message of the kingdom, and that's what actually brings about the miraculous transformation of the new birth. That's what does it, and that seed has to go all the way to the heart.

Counterfeit Christians don't understand that. They may say they do. In some cases, they may even have a lot of Bible knowledge, but they don't understand the gospel, the word of the kingdom. Now, what we're saying is a real Christian is a Christian who has been **affected, changed, transformed** by the Word of God, not just on the outside but on the inside, in the heart.

Romans 6:17–18, gives us a perfect picture of what a Christian is. There the Apostle Paul says, "*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become **obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching** to which you were committed,¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*" It's all there. **You obeyed from the heart the standard of teaching**. First of all, you see the mind, the will, and the emotions are all involved. You have **the mind** first. There was a form of teaching that came in. We've seen that. You cannot be a Christian unless you accept truth, doctrine, and teaching. It has to come in. That's the first thing. A minimal core of the message of the kingdom ... the gospel ... has to be there.

Secondly, it comes into **the will**. It goes all the way into the heart, and the way you can see it's come all the way into the heart, you understand, is it results in a changed life and greater obedience. So you have the mind, you have the will, and you have the emotions. The thing to keep in mind is in the Bible the word **heart** means the seat of the mind, the will, and the emotions. In English, the word **heart** usually just means the emotions, right? The Bible never uses the word **heart** like that. Sometimes the Bible says you **think** in your heart. Sometimes the

Bible says you **act** with your heart. Sometimes the Bible says you **feel** with your heart, because the heart is the seat of all three. So what Paul is saying in Romans 6 is if the truth gets into your heart, it effects your mind, it effects your will, and it effects your emotions ... all three.

So that **really long explanation** sets the stage for understanding this parable. **Real Christians** know and believe the Word of God, it's had an effect on their heart, including the mind, will, and emotions, and it's evident in a life that's changing and growing in grace. **Counterfeit Christians** may know the word of God, but it **hasn't** gotten into their heart, it **hasn't** had any great effect on their mind, will, and emotions, and there's **little** or no evidence that their life has changed or that they're growing in grace.

All of which brings us to our text for today — Matthew 13 and Jesus' Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Similar to the Parable of the Sower, it comes to us in two parts. First Jesus tells them the parable, and then later, He explains it to His disciples. So, first we have the parable, which teaches us about ...

v. 24–30: THE KING'S FARM

“He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’²⁸ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.³⁰ 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.’”

First of all, notice the parable has three features to it. Three movements. First, the work of the farmer. He sows wheat. He sows good seed, and the crop begins to grow. The second feature is the work of the enemy. The enemy comes in and sows a counter-crop. Literally, the weed he sows is called zizania.

Now you don't want to grow zizania anywhere. Zizania was the bane of the farmers everywhere (especially wheat farmers) in this part of the world because zizania was actually a degenerate form of wheat. It looked just like the wheat as it grew up, and it grew in the fields with the wheat, but when it came to maturity, it showed there was no grain. There was no head of grain at all. It was just stalk. Yet what happen is the zizania grows alongside of the wheat, and it soaks up the nutrients, soaks up the moisture, and stunts the growth of the crop.

So the first feature is the farmer has sown his good seed. The second feature is there is a time between the sowing and the reaping, between the sowing and the harvest, in which not only does the crop of the farmer grows but also the crop of the enemy grows. They contend with each other. Then the third feature is the **patience** of the farmer. You see that here at the end in verses 29 and 30.

People say, “What should we do about it?” The farmer's reaction to the work of the enemy is, “Be patient. Right now things are confused. Right now things are difficult to discern, but eventually there will be judgment. Eventually we will be able to judge between the wheat and the weeds. Eventually the weeds will be taken up and burned. Eventually the wheat will be brought in to me, but for right now be patient.” Those are the three features of the parable.

There has been the seeding, the sowing, of a good crop. There is a period of time in which two crops contend with each other, but at the end, everything will be made clear. Meanwhile, be patient. What does this mean?

What Jesus teaches in this parable are these two things. There are really two principles. The first is in the world today, there are two kingdoms. There are actually two orders of reality side-by-side, contending with each other. The second thing He's trying to teach us is there is nothing more important in life ... there is **absolutely** nothing more important ... than to know the difference between those two crops, to know the difference between those two kingdoms, and to **which one you belong**. There are the two points. There are two crops. There are two kingdoms. They are side-by-side in the world contending with each other, and it's imperative for you to know the difference and to which one you belong.

Starting with verse 36, Jesus explains to His disciples that because it's the King's farm, then it's also ...

v. 36–43: THE KING'S HARVEST

“Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’’³⁷ He answered, ‘‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.’’

A couple of things we need to learn about the harvest. I realize that there are very few people here who grew up on farms, myself included. However, my grandparents were farmers and so growing up, I heard farm stories from my Mom all the time. And by the very nature of farming, farmers learn two things very quickly. One; you can't **rush** the crops, and two; you have to **work** hard. So how do those things translate to what Jesus is teaching here?

Here in this wonderful parable Jesus tells us you that you can't **rush** and you have to **work hard**. Specifically, you have to avoid, on the one hand, being a zealot, and on the other hand, being too passive. You see, sometimes people (especially when they first come to Christ) expect a harvest **right away**.

They don't understand why it is that people who have hurt them don't seem to get punished. They don't understand why it is that things they pray for don't immediately come true. They don't understand why it is that when they've done these great ministries, the fruit is never quite what they want. They don't understand why these things aren't happening **right away**.

Jesus comes in and says, “You have to remember the kingdom of God is **like farming**.” First of all, a Christian is so incredibly stable, because when you see success, a Christian says, “Yes, I know, but it's temporary, because there will also be the work of the Enemy. Until the last day, I realize even the greatest things that happened to me will always be tainted.” On the other hand, a Christian is never, passive and cynical, because a Christian says, “All right. I've been hurt, but some day, that's going to be set straight. I don't have to set it straight by myself. This hasn't been working in my life, but someday it will. Your will is for my utter sanctification.

Your will is to make me holy, not just happy.” See, what I want to know ... is do you have the stability in your life that comes from knowing that the kingdom of God is **like farming**?

If you are overly zealous, certain that tomorrow you're going to turn everything around, ready to condemn anybody who is not perfect, any church that's not perfect, any situation that's not perfect, sure that you're going to bring about the perfect, ideal situation, you don't understand the kingdom. If, on the other hand, you're cynical, you're pessimistic, you've given up, you're bitter, you're forgetting about the inevitable harvest.

You can't **rush** the kingdom; spiritual growth comes on God's schedule, not yours. And yet, you can't quit either, because it's taking too long. You know you're going to have to do the **hard work** of sowing the Word of God, and the equally **hard work** of being **patient** while God the Holy Spirit puts that Word to work in the lives of others. You can't **rush**; you have to **work hard**, because the kingdom of God is **like farming**.

However, notice that I spoke about sowing and waiting, but not about reaping. Why? Because Jesus is the farmer and when it comes to spiritual things, He's the Lord of the Harvest. You're not in charge of the harvest, Jesus is. So how come He gets to harvest and you don't? Well ... He's a lot better at it than you are. We have to realize a very frightening fact: one of the ways in which the kingdom of God is opposed by the evil one is that he plants people who they look like Christians (they're moral, they're decent, they're maybe even religious) but who, in the end, find out they have no grain. In the end, they find out they're not really Christians after all. They're **counterfeit**.

One of the **great** things about this passage, and at the same time, one of the **frightening** things about this passage, is that we see one of the main strategies against the kingdom is this idea of **counterfeits**. What does it mean when it says the Enemy sows weeds that look just like wheat until the very end? It means a lot of people are duped into thinking they're Christians **when they're not**. That's the clear, clear statement of this passage. That should frighten us some.

And it should frighten us because most everybody in this country thinks they're Christians. Unless you're Jewish, unless you're from another country and you're Buddhist or you're Muslim, some clearly **different** religion, for the most part, you think you're a Christian. You may not go to church, but you live by Christian principles. You think you're a pretty good person. Or maybe you come to church and you think you're a Christian **because** you come to church. Jesus says, "Look at what the difference is between the two." Let me just give you a couple of important tests.

First of all, real Christians are sons of the kingdom. That means they have been planted. That means they're miracles. You know, why does God use "**born again**" to describe what it means to be a Christian? Why does Jesus use being planted as one of the metaphors? Because a plant exists completely through the operation of something else. A plant can't plant itself. A baby can't make itself born. A person who's a Christian knows that even though you've struggled and worked very hard in the process of becoming a Christian, once you become a Christian, you realize there was an outside power that was at work in your life. You realize someone has been opening your eyes. Someone has been guiding you. Someone has been changing your life.

If you think Christianity is a matter of self-reformation, making a few decisions, sort of straightening your life out and living a good life, if you think Christianity is something you do and you have never sensed the power of God coming in and showing you things you've never

seen about yourself before and changing your life, a spiritual power moving in from the outside, reaching in and re-making you from the inside-out, you don't really understand what Christianity is. I'm not saying it necessarily has to be an immediate change or a dramatic life-crisis, but every Christian is someone who knows, "I'm a miracle. God's power has changed me." That's the first thing.

Then secondly, what's really the difference between the wheat and the weeds? How do you know the difference? **Growth! Growth!** It's all growth. You see, in the end, the Christian **grows** into the likeness of Christ. The person who's merely moral doesn't really **grow** spiritually. A Christian is somebody who **grows** more and more in the grace and knowledge of God as the years go by. A non-Christian, a **counterfeit** Christian, may look like everything's going well with him, but there's no growth. They're not **growing** in the grace and knowledge of God, there's little evidence of obedience to the Word of God in their life, they don't seem to care about or consider the things of God apart from Sunday morning.

And one of the greatest tests is that they **rarely feel like a sinner**. They're fine, thank you very much. I'm here, aren't I? What more do you want? I go to church, I punch my ticket, I'm good to go, get off my case.

But a real Christian grows in humility and joy at the same time. If you've been a Christian for 10 plus years, the strangest thing has happened to you. You're far more aware of your faults than you used to be, far more aware of your weaknesses, far more aware of your sins than you ever were before, and yet, at the same time, you feel more loved by the Father than ever before.

That is absolutely unique to Christianity. The more sinful I feel, the more I loved I feel. That is absolutely unique. The gospel creates that in you, and you can see that happening. You can't believe it. You find yourself getting humbler, less swagger, less arrogant, more sensitive because you know about your sins. At the same time, you feel more loved and more loved and more loved, because you see, in the end, it's the love of God the Father that we experience, and we sense His love more and more as time goes on.

Are you growing in those ways? Is your life being transformed by the Word of God? Are you seeing the Holy Spirit change how you think and how you act and how you speak? Do you have a greater sense of your own sin and yet feel the Lord's love more and more all the time? Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Do you understand that being a Christian is a kingdom thing? Do you have the spiritual stability that comes from knowing the kingdom of God is like farming? Do you know you can't rush, and yet you have to work hard to follow the King? And in the end, you have to trust that the harvest is His ... and He knows what He's doing.

Think about that ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Help us to be people being changed by Your Word. Help us to be people who know that we are loved by God the Father. Help us to understand that the Kingdom of God is like farming, where you can't rush, but you have to work hard. Help us to trust Jesus as the Lord of the Harvest. And we know that we can only do these things by faith. And so, O Lord, if there is anyone among us this day, who comes here not trusting in Christ, we would ask that by Your Spirit that You would draw

that person to Yourself — by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone — that they might embrace the beloved Son. Help us to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

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2 Peter 3:17–18

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”