

Pastor Tom Mortenson

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The Parable of the Soils

Matthew 13:24-30

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you that we have a Lord who we can praise, a Lord who we can give thanks to, a Lord who came and lived amongst us perfectly and then died for us. What a gift, what an incredible blessing that we have. Father, again, we want to thank you and praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit and the gift of your word. This is what we are going to unpack this morning. And, again, we just pray as we are about to unlock your word that your Holy Spirit would accompany us, we recognize the impossibility of doing that without your Spirit's presence. And so we pray that you would guide us, accompany us and make this of lasting value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been studying the parables of Jesus in Matthew 13, and last time we looked at the parable of the soils and we saw that there are basically four different responses to the gospel and only one of those four responses is real and lasting and it was this seed sown in good soil. Of course good soil is the soil that produces fruit, and fruit is the visible presence of the Holy

Spirit's work in our lives. *Galatians 5:22* says: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* These are the nine qualities that mark really the essence of who Jesus Christ was. And when we by faith become children of God, God begins to grow those fruits in our lives.

I said last time fruit bearing is not really optional. It is in fact so much a part of who a child of God is that Jesus said in *Matthew 7*: *"So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."* Good soil always produces good fruit. This was the parable that Jesus was teaching to the disciples and it literally was a shock to them because Jesus spoke in a new way and he hadn't given them any warning that he was going to start speaking this way, but they may well have found his explanation of the parable even more shocking than the parable itself. You see, the disciples thought this Messiah was going to rule the kingdom with a fist of iron, and here Jesus is painting a very different picture in this parable. And he seems awfully accommodating. I mean, he outright rejects of the wayside soil, the abandonment of the rocky soil, the double mindedness of the

thorny soil, these did not fit with this idea the disciples had of what the Messiah was and how he was going to respond. The disciples probably expected the parable of the soils instead there's good soil and there's dead soil. And of course those who respond, and those who do not respond are those who are instantly judged for daring to defy the king. And we can see the disciples thinking that and they say, you know, this is what happens if you step outside the bounds, you get destroyed. And of course we, as his trusty disciples, will make sure that that happens. You see, the disciples saw Jesus as their new king and they saw themselves as their lieutenants. And we know this about these men. You see, God never shielded them or us from the penetrating gaze of his Holy Spirit and we see this in scripture. We know this about the disciples because the Spirit reveals it in the gospels. They were -- they were constantly jostling each other for position and for power. *Mark 10* says: *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him -- this is Jesus -- and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."* Well, this was a blatant power grab and not only was it a power grab, it was sneaky. And we know that because verse 41 says: *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.* And we know that wasn't their only clash. We know

there was an even worse one in Luke 22. God tells us they got into yet another power struggle in of all places, the last supper. *Luke 22* says: *A dispute also rose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.* So we have Jesus about to be crucified for these men and all they can think about is which one of them is greater than the other. These were the men who Jesus said would sit on the twelve thrones ruling the twelve tribes of Israel. But they clearly had feet of clay. And what we love about them is that they are just like us. And they were just like us until God began growing fruit in their soil.

And so this is what Jesus is explaining to the disciples, and much of what Jesus explains to them is shocking in his delivery, but it's even more shocking in his explanation because Jesus is turning their understanding of this kingdom of God, he's turning it upside down. Jesus is using these parables to introduce this radically new idea to his disciples and they've had thousands of years of tradition that's kind of made them dull of hearing. We've had over 2,000 years since to understand God's purpose. The disciples basically had the Old Testament understanding that God was wholly unapproachable. They understood that it was only through a high priest once a year on the day of atonement would someone dared, dared to draw near to a holy God. And to approach God like we do now would not only be presumptuous and foolish, it would be deadly.

And so Jesus is introducing a brand new paradigm here and he's using parables as a teaching device and he's teaching about this brand new idea called "the church." You have to understand, the church before never even existed even as concept. I mean today we understand that we are the body of Christ. We understand that we are the bride of Christ, that which he has given his life for and that each of us are separate vital parts of a visible representation of Jesus Christ on earth. We understand that we are interconnected and interrelated and that we exist for the glory of God. Think about how the disciples understood the body of Christ. They understood it as a body with two arms, two legs, a trunk and a head. And they understood their relationship to God as being one where he speaks and they're supposed to obey. But now Jesus is speaking of things that they can't even begin to understand. And Jesus through this parable of the soils has just explained that this new kingdom idea of a church would be something that they'd never even imagined. It would be this mixture of good time rocky soil believers and double minded thorny soil believers and true good soil believers, and the only way to tell who was who was by their fruit. But Jesus doesn't stop there. I mean, they hadn't even begun starting to digest the full implications of the parable of the soils and Jesus decides that now's the time to introduce yet another parable. And that's what we're going to be looking at this morning.

This is *Matthew 13* starting at verse 24. He says: *He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 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?' 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?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 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.'"*

Again you have to understand what these parables are like coming from Jesus's mouth. He just states them. There's no explanation whatsoever, I mean, he just basically comes up and he gives people another farming story. There's no other explanation as to what's taking place. He's just talking about seeds and misdeeds of mis-sowing weeds and this kind of stuff. So you have to just picture the disciples and they're scratching their heads because he's just told them the parable of the soils and they understood none of that at all until he began to explain it. And having just

talked extensively about the nature of the soils, Jesus is now starting to speak about the weeds. It may as well have been nuclear fusion, for all these guys knew. And we know that because later in *Matthew 13* we read: *Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parables of the weeds of the field." He answered, "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. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."*

And once again Jesus is telling the crowd and us "he who has ears to hear, let him hear" and we find out the story is obviously very complex, it's very multi-layered, there's all kinds of things going on in the story but Jesus gave no clue whatsoever to the crowd as he's speaking this. It's only afterwards as he's speaking to the disciples that he gives a very straightforward explanation of what

the symbols and the characters and the consequences of the story is. And once again the disciples just don't get it. And along with the disciples it's pretty much we who don't get it as well. I mean how many times have you heard someone say that the church is a mixture of wheat and tares and that these tares or weeds that look just like wheat and they're thinking that what God is talking about is that eventually he's going to cleanse the church by punishing the unbelieving weeds on judgment day. Well, Jesus is actually saying something quite different from that. And how we understand it has a profound effect on how we relate to the world. You see Jesus wasn't speaking about the church when he said that the wheat and the tares would grow together. In fact Jesus was speaking about the world. I mean in verse 37 to 39 Jesus gives us this detailed cast of characters describing what he means about the parables of the wheat and the tares -- the wheat and the one who sowed weeds. And he says in verse 37: *"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man."* In verse 38 he said: *"The field is the world."* He says: *"The good seed is the sons of the kingdom."* *"The weeds are the sons of the evil one."* In verse 39 he tells us: *"The enemy who sowed them is the devil."* He says: *"The harvest is at the end of the age, and the reapers are angels."* That's an enormous amount of information. And this in fact is a stunning development because Jesus is piling on the revelation and the teaching here. I mean, he's just told the disciples in the parable

of the soils that the church is going to be this mixture of rocky, thorny, and good soil believers and that in itself is a shock. But now he's telling them the church is going to be set up in the midst of and grow with the world. I mean, to the disciples, this is a disaster. I mean the Jews just did not mingle with the world. You just didn't do that. It was unclean. Jesus has repeatedly scandalized the Pharisees and the disciples simply by the act of touching people. And now he's painting an even more scandalous picture. He said the kingdom that the disciples envisioned would come but that's not going to come until judgment day at the very end of time, and Jesus would indeed rule with a rod of iron and evil would indeed be judged but in between there's going to be this mystery of this thing called "the church." God's grace is going to break out of its Jewish boundaries to do what God had promised Abraham all the way back in Genesis where he proclaimed: *"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* See, the gospel is going to go from you Jews to the entire world and it's going to do that through the church. I mean now you have to remember Jesus speaking in parables in the first place, this was a judgment on the Jewish rejection of the final mediator that God had sent to Israel. Of course that was Jesus himself, that was Emanuel, that was God with us. And again you have to remember the Jewish rejection of Jesus is no surprise to God whatsoever. I

mean, God had predicted it through Isaiah and the prophets centuries before. I mean Isaiah in *Isaiah 53* said flat out that: *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* But you see, that rejection was going to be the opening for a great blessing. The disciples were the very first hearers of how that blessing was going to be accomplished. And what they learned was that God's new program for blessing the non Jewish world was going to have three very different phases. Instead of separating themselves from the world, the kingdom would commingle with the world. It would also co-labor with it. And through the church God would draw his chosen people by literally co-opting their value systems with the gospel.

Commingling, co-laboring, and co-opting the world was Jesus's chosen means of now declaring war on the kingdom of darkness. And the disciples were just the first ones to hear this new battle plan that started in the parable with co-mingling. Here Jesus begins to describe himself as the sower, and he describes the field that he's sowing in as the world. And he's sowing good seed and the good seed is believers, and the weeds are the sons of the evil one. Now Jesus starts out with the claim that we often forget and that is that this world belongs first and foremost to him. I think of the humility of Jesus when you read the story of his life and the

insults that he constantly dealt with, being born the son of a peasant woman and a carpenter, and he's walking around, just imagine how that would feel if you knew your heart of hearts: I own this. This is mine. I made this. I made you. I own everything. It belongs to me. That's who Jesus is. I mean in verse 24 Jesus says: *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field."* Jesus is just stating the obvious. The psalmist says in *Psalm 24: The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.* *Colossians 1:16* says: *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him.* Jesus owns the world. It's his field. And that's what he's saying. He tells us that he sowed good seed in his field and the good seed that he sowed are the children of God. But then he says: *"But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away."* Jesus is making an agricultural reference that virtually everyone there understood. In fact the practice of over seeding a field with weeds was common enough to be outlawed by Roman law at the time. It was a quick and easy way to ruin somebody's, an enemy's livelihood. And the problem with tares was that it was a weed that looked exactly like young wheat and by the time it was identifiable as a weed, the harvest would be ruined and the time for re-

planting would be gone. Again verse 26 says: *"So when the Plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also."* And Jesus has already told us who the characters are. Verse 38 he made it very clear, he said: *"The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one."* So we are the good seed, not because we are good, but because we have been adopted as God's own son. Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price by ransoming his children with his own blood on the cross and he substituted his righteousness for our sins so he could glorify the Father by redeeming his good seed out of the world. So when we by faith become children of God, his righteousness becomes our righteousness before God, so therefore, we are good not because we're good but because we have his goodness. God's possession is born-again believers. They are what he calls "the good seed." They're good seed planted in God's field which is the world planted by God's Son. And as he says the problem is there's an enemy who over sows the very same fields with weeds.

And the parable goes on to say in verse 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?' 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?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with*

them. 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."

So what Jesus is saying here is that the good seeds are the seeds that he sowed and the bad seeds were seeds sown by the enemy and that they're going to commingle until the harvest. Jesus is very clear about what's going to take place and who it is that's going to be doing the harvesting. He says: *"The harvest is at the end of the age and the reapers are angels."* So we have to understand what Jesus is saying here. He's saying that Christians are to be in the world, commingling with it, until Jesus returns and that the task of separating out the weeds for judgment is not one that belongs to the church, it belongs instead to Jesus and his angels. And he goes on to say in verse 40: *"Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."*

So the servants who approach the master about the weeds, they are angels. They're not the church. That puts a whole different slant on how the church sees itself in the world. I get very nervous

when the church starts to see herself as the primary agent of political change in the world. I mean, even though there are some political battles that are unavoidable because they directly bear on God's law, for example, God insists that I love my neighbor and he insists that thou shalt not murder and when my neighbor happens to live in a womb and is about to be murdered, my response needs to be political to prevent that. But real change does not take place in a voting booth, it only takes place in the heart. And there's a reason why God and his angels have the task of separating the good and the bad seed and not the church and it's very important, it's critical to remember this, it's because much of the good seed that makes up the church at one time looked exactly like the bad seed that makes up the world. That's why Jesus tells that we're not only to commingle with the world, we are also to co-labor with them. I mean to co-labor simply means to work together with, but for many evangelicals the idea of co-laboring sounds an awful lot like collaborating and it's roughly on a par of the traitors who collaborated with the Nazis in World War II. And we have to ask what is it then we are to co-labor for with the world? I mean after all, Paul did say in *2 Corinthians 6: Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple*

of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing, then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." Well, you look at that say what more do you need to know? Isn't that enough instruction for us that we're supposed to stay out of the world? But that's not what Paul is saying. He lists four different things that believers are to shun. He lists lawlessness, darkness, Belial or the devil, and idols. He says do not have these things in common with the world. Do not have these things in common with unbelievers. But he clearly doesn't mean us to shun unbelievers. In fact it says just the opposite in *1 Corinthians 5*, he says this, he's referring to a previous letter, he says: *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people -- not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or swindler -- not even to eat with such a one.* What Paul is saying here is, look, if you got any ministry whatsoever with the world, it's going to bring you face to face with the immoral

and the greedy and the idolater and the reviler and the drunkard and the swindler who incidentally you all were at one time before you met the grace of God. Sadly what Paul is saying is there are many who are that way after having met the grace of God. And what Paul is saying is they who call themselves Christians, those folks are the ones to avoid. He says don't even have a meal with them. In the very next chapter Paul says: *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

And so the operating principle we have, it dovetails so nicely with this idea of the world and the field. What Paul is saying is such were some of you. You see, the good seed at one time looked and acted exactly like the bad seed. It looked like weeds, it acted like weeds. And you have to remember what happened when the servants approached the master and said, "Do you want us to pull them up?" Verse 29 says: *But he said, "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."* And again what Jesus is saying is it's not your job to judge who is wheat and who is

weeds. That's way beyond our pay scale. And what he says in verse 44, he says: *"The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace."* We are not the judges of the world. We are the co-laborers with the world.

And so the logical question is, okay, co-laborers for what? Co-laborers for the good of my neighbor. When the Israelites were exiled to Babylon which was obviously a city filled with gross idolatry and paganism, God gave them this instruction in *Jeremiah 29*. He says: *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."* God told these folks they're going to be in Babylon for two whole generations, they needed to send down roots into the community. But God very clearly says they were to pray for the prosperity of wicked Babylon. And lest you think this is a command unique to one time and one place, consider Paul's words to Timothy in *1 Timothy 2:1*. He says: *First of all, then, I urge that*

supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Well, you got to know it's next to impossible to bring requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving for communities that you avoid like the plague.

Tim Keller points out that one of the greatest advances that ever took place in the gospel was in the Greco-Roman Empire, and it was due to the church's response to an actual plague. It was the Bubonic Plague, and it was a disease that was so hideous that it caused a fear that was so great that thousands of homes and families with sickness were simply abandoned. Well, guess who remained to minister to those who were sick and dying? It was the Christians. It was the good seed commingling with the weeds. I mean, they labored and they, too, oftentimes took sick and many of them also died. But they believed in an eternal kingdom that allowed them to minister in spite of the danger. And when the disease waned around 1350 A.D. there was this unusually disproportionate remnant of Christians who had stayed behind and brand new Christians who had been converted by the lives that had been laid down in sacrifice. It was the direct effect of good seed

commingling and co-laboring with the world. And they are what made Europe a Christian nation for centuries. These were believers who were in the world but not of the world. And you know what they were, they were good seed sown by the master, ministering among fields of what looked like weeds. See that's the task that God first gave the disciples and this is the task he's given to us. And practically speaking it means intentionally looking at a mixed field of wheat and weeds for a harvest. Jesus says in *John 4*: "*Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for the harvest.*" Jesus tells us the primary way we find the harvest is simply by opening our eyes.

He says: "*Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes.*" Okay. How do we do that? Well, have you ever been invited to a picnic? Ever been invited to a party? It's a field. Lift up your eyes. And do you have an opportunity to socially interact with unbelievers? Christ is saying that's a field. You need to open your eyes. We've spoken about intentionality before. It means intentionally deciding to join a bowling or a softball team or a motorcycle club or a knitting and quilting circle, any such thing simply to have access with unbelievers. That's what Jesus is talking about. I mean I've actually heard Christians brag that they have no non-Christian friends whatsoever. That's not something to brag

about at all. Tim Keller put the question simply and starkly, he said, are you willing to love people who cannot or will not come into your worldview? Are you willing to prayerfully and intentionally cultivate relationships with those who are outside the kingdom? They're not going to come to us. They're not going to walk in those doors say, "Tell me what you got." They're not going to do that. We need to go to them. And for some reason we think that it's perfectly normal for people to go thousands of miles overseas and to learn languages and cultures to connect with folks and build relationships to earn the right to share the good news there, but somehow we're not supposed to do that. Somehow we get a pass. Every one of us is a missionary, and every one of us has a field. Because we're the good seed that the master has sown. We commingle with the weeds. We even co-labor with them for peaceful lives and godliness and holiness because most of us started out looking like weeds as well.

So how do we harvest wheat out of weeds? Well, the answer is we don't. We can only harvest what the master has planted. He's the one who does the planting, and he alone knows his own. So the question becomes, all right, well, how do we harvest his own? Well, we go back to what Jesus said when he gave the initial instructions. I mean remember what Jesus instructed his disciples to do when they looked on the fields that were overripe for

harvest? What did he say? He said, "Pray." Remember? He said, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest." And the reason why he said that is because it's his harvest. I mean we're the servants, we're just working his field and he says that we are to work the fields and to work among the weeds, we're to commingle, we're to co-labor and finally he says we are to co-opt. And to co-opt is simply to win someone over to an established group. Okay. How do we do that? Well, again, *Proverbs 11*, we looked at this before, it says: *He who wins souls is wise.* And we pointed out that the wisdom in winning souls involves first and foremost prayer. I mean you really have to buy into this idea that God lives rent-free inside the heads of every single person on this planet. He's the only one that has access other than the person themselves. So it makes perfect sense that the first person you go to is God because God's going to make that person, he's going to transform that person from weed into wheat by moving inside the person's heart and head and mind and soul and that's as a result of prayer. I mean we've already pointed out that wisdom in winning souls involves first and foremost prayer. Secondly, it involves who we really are, sinners saved by grace alone, darkness made light by the light of the world now bearing witness to that light. I mean nobody is interested in holier than thou phonies. And we become that when we forget that we, too, were once dead-ringers for weeds. You know if you think the world's got cooties, don't be surprised when it thinks that

you're a phony and a Pharisee. God said: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* And what he's saying is let your light so shine before men, not before the church, not before all the other lights in the Christian community. God says let your light shine where it is desperately needed and that's in other people's darkness. You know, as much as I'm not a fan of the lottery, I agree with their statement: You have to be in it to win it. I mean it applies to the harvest field. You have to be part of people's lives if you ever hope to co-opt weeds into wheat.

So how do you co-opt souls? Well, when you commingle and you co-labor with the world, you give them the opportunity to see the grace of God worked out in real life. I've always -- I've known this to be the case, folks love to make caricatures of Christians and they do that because it keeps them safely away. You know what Christians are like? They're this, they're that, and the other thing, there's these holy chosen and they only want to lay their number on you, that's the way they are. And it's only when you get to know somebody, and I've had these opportunities with people who had that exact opinion and I said you never knew a Christian with skin on them, a real person. And once you start knowing a real person, they start seeing a very different understanding of what the gospel is. When they actually get to know somebody and see the

fruit that God has grown in your life, it can change everything. I mean there's a number of reasons why the Master told his servants to let the wheat and the weeds grow together. One was because only God and his angels could tell wheat and weeds apart. Another was there was this great danger of pulling out the wheat with the weeds, but perhaps the most important reason why wheat and weeds must grow together is so that God can show himself to the good seeds who just don't know it yet, and the way he shows them is you.

Paul once responded to a church that wanted letters of recommendation. This is what he said. He said: *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.* What God is saying is I don't need a letter. You're the letter. I send you out into the world. You're the letter I send out into the world through the good seeds in the field.

So my question this morning is: Are you that letter? Are you that letter written by Christ not with ink but with his Spirit? And is your heart the very place where he has written? See, there are

good seeds planted by the master in his field and they look just like we did at one point, they looked just like weeds. And we're the ones who God has called on to help them blossom into wheat and we do that by co-opting the weeds. We do that with the fruit of God's Spirit growing in our own good soil. And so to put both of Jesus's parables together, this is what he's telling the disciples, he says, we are the good seed, that's us, made good by grace alone that God sows in the good soil for the express purpose of bearing fruit. And so then he sows us and we grow up among weeds sown by an enemy in the very same field that is the world. And Jesus says to his servants, don't pull the weeds up yet because weeds and wheat look identical and you might pull up wheat along with the weeds. And so he instructs us: *"Let your light so shine among men."* Let the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, let the fruit of the Spirit, the good seed in good soil, the good seed that good soil always produces, let that fruit co-opt or win over the good seed that's in the field that still looks like weeds. And how do you do that? By demonstrating in our lives what God's grace can do. You see, by God's grace alone we know who we are, we know why we're here, we know where we're going. But we can't impart that grace without a relationship. You have to earn the right to be heard. And we do that by being in the world but not of the world. And there's also a caveat here, I mean, some of us have a hard time

making a distinction between the "in the world" and the "of the world," and we can be pulled back into that world by failing to act wisely and there might be some places that we shouldn't go to and some people we shouldn't see. I mean if God has rescued me from an addiction to alcohol, I probably have no business being in a bar. If I'm a married man, chances are real good that God isn't pointing me to single females as a mission field. I mean you have to remember, God doesn't need any of us to accomplish his task. He privileges us to participate with him in the harvest of his field which is the whole world. He expects us to commingle with the wheat and the weeds because much of that wheat looked like weeds at one time and we're in no position to judge. We are not overseers of the crop, we are the crop. And God expects us to co-labor with the world and not for the world's sake but for the master's fields and the crop that he has sown.

And finally he gives us the grace to co-opt, to win over lives by seeing the hand of God written on hearts. You know, the enemy has indeed over sown God's field with weeds, but Jesus still owns the fields and he is still Lord of the harvest yet to come. And he tells us: *"The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like*

the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

See right now we grow shoulder to shoulder with folks who are either going to shine like the sun or face fiery judgment when the harvest comes in, and every day brings it closer. I mean that should fill us with a holy dread for our loved ones who are living as weeds in these fields. And prayer is the primary weapon that we have. And so I have to ask all of us, are we praying? I mean it's the one weapon that's going to equip us for the task that Jesus has given us in *John 4* where he says, pray, "*Pray to the Lord of the harvest.*"

You know, just yesterday we had a family reunion that had been planned for -- since January, 130 of our family members. And Janice and I, I mean, for weeks beforehand we just prayed to the Lord of the harvest, prayed that we would be able to have conversations that were meaningful, that were something that could work, something that could be a blessing to God. I had three different conversations. I had one with one that was clearly wheat but two with weeds that sure looked like God was pulling them towards wheat. And it was a wonderful thing and I thought how much of that was because we had prayed and prayed and prayed and asked God to give us part of the harvest. And so I just conclude by

telling you this is what we have to do, our task is to open our eyes. *"Open your eyes and look to the fields, for they are ripe for the harvest."* So let's pray, Lord, for us to open our eyes. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the privilege that you have given to us. I thank you for the fields that belong to you, the fields that have been over sown by the enemy, and the task that we have, Lord, to commingle and to co-labor and to co-opt all of those fields so that we would have the privilege of drawing those weeds into the position where they now are wheat. Lord, give us the will and the way to seek you each day in prayer for opportunities and give us those opportunities, Lord, allow us the privilege of being those who are working in your field, changing weed into wheat, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.