

SESSION 12

Judgment Coming

MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

FAITH IN JESUS DETERMINES OUR ETERNAL DESTINY.



The Great Divide! Every day we find ourselves on one side or the other of the great divide—country music, yes or no? The G.O.A.T. in basketball—Michael Jordan or LeBron James? Broccoli—yes or no? Everywhere you look, people are being divided into one of two groups based on preferences, circumstances, or the whims of others. Sometimes we get to choose on which side we will fall; other times we have no choice. Today’s session speaks of a divide where each has a choice as to where they land. Choose wisely!

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER DIVIDES YOU’RE CONFRONTED WITH DAILY?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapter 12, Matthew focused on the escalating conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus. The opposition to Jesus soon extended beyond the religious leaders to include many people of the land. The result was the dividing of people into two groups: those who believed Jesus was the Messiah and those who didn’t.

In response, Jesus told several parables to illustrate the divide. The Greek word translated *parable* means “to lay or place something alongside of.” A parable lays something alongside something else for comparison or contrast.

The parables Jesus told were stories related to daily life laid alongside spiritual truths. There was always a central point in each parable Jesus told.

Matthew 13 contains eight parables that relate truths concerning the kingdom of God. In several of them we find an explanation of the growing divide between those who follow Jesus and those who resist Him.

Following the parable of the seed and sower (Matt. 13:3-9), Jesus was asked by the disciples, “Why do you teach in parables?” In response, He revealed two reasons: (1) to reveal truth to those willing to listen and heed the teaching and (2) to conceal truth from those who stubbornly refused to believe. This fulfilled the prophecy given in Isaiah 6:9-10 that spoke of unbelief that led to the inability to comprehend what was being taught.

Jesus sometimes explained the meaning of a parable. Such was the case with the parables of the seed and the sower (vv. 18-23) and the wheat and the weeds (vv. 24-30, 36-43).

Other parables in this chapter include the mustard seed and leaven (vv. 31-33), the hidden treasure and a valuable pearl (vv. 44-46), and the fishing net (vv. 47-50).



24 He presented another **parable** **A** to them: “The **kingdom of heaven** **B** may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. **25** But while people were sleeping, his **enemy** **C** came, **sowed weeds** **D** among the wheat, and left. **26** When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. **27** The land-owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Master, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?’ **28** ‘An enemy did this,’ he told them. ‘So, do you want us to go and pull them up?’ the servants asked him. **29** ‘No,’ he said. ‘When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. **30** Let both **grow together** **E** until the harvest. At **harvest time** **F** I’ll tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to **burn them**, **G** but collect the wheat in my barn.’” [. . .] **36** Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” **37** He replied, “The one who sows the good seed is the **Son of Man**; **H** **38** the field is the world; and the good seed—these are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the **children of the evil one**, **I** **39** and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. **40** Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. **41** The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness. **42** They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then the righteous will **shine like the sun** **J** in their Father’s kingdom. Let anyone who has ears listen.”

A. A story that conveys spiritual truth in everyday images.

B. The reign of God, present and future, encompassing His redemptive work through Christ and fulfilling His rule.

C. Satan, the very real opponent of God (v. 39). Satan twists God’s words and creates cheap imitations to undermine His work in the world.

D. Sowing weeds in an enemy’s field was so common that Rome made a law against it.

E. It would be difficult to tell the wheat from the weeds until they both matured. Likewise, believers and unbelievers may look similar, but their true natures will be revealed eventually.

F. The time of judgment when God will separate the righteous from the wicked (vv. 39-42).

G. The ungodly will face God’s wrath and judgment. Meanwhile, the righteous will be gathered into God’s presence.

H. A messianic title Jesus used for Himself (Dan. 7:13-14), emphasizing both His humanity and His divine authority.

I. Those who follow Satan by rejecting the gospel and opposing God’s kingdom.

J. Rather than being tormented by fire, God’s true people will be radiant like the sun.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Wheat or Weeds

(Matt. 13:24-30)

We must examine our own faith as we wait for Jesus's return.

- **Is it always possible to distinguish sincere believers from insincere believers? How?**

2. Jesus or the Devil

(Matt. 13:36-39)

We need to recognize that not all who profess to believe in Jesus are genuine believers.

- **Why would Satan want to sow "weeds" in the world?**
- **What is the church's responsibility regarding the "weeds" sown by the devil?**

3. Heaven or Hell

(Matt. 13:40-43)

We can trust that Jesus will have the final word and that He will judge righteously.

- **Does knowing there will be a final judgment with eternal consequences bring you comfort or concern? If concerned, talk to your group leader about your concerns.**

DID YOU KNOW?

Sowing weeds in an enemy's field was such a common practice in that day that the Roman government issued a law against it.

Apply the Text

- **What role does your Bible study group have in discerning true followers of Christ from those who are counterfeit?**
- **What might your group do to help people move from counterfeit followers to true followers of Jesus?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. (See Matthew 16:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.

Focus on Matthew 13:40-42. Read the verses aloud, emphasizing the actions of the angels. Then read the verses again, emphasizing the responses of those "guilty of lawlessness." How do these verses make you feel? How do they motivate you to share Christ's gospel?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 13:40-43. Are these verses terrifying or comforting? Explain.

Jesus told a parable about wheat and weeds growing together in a field. The landowner's servants questioned if they should pull up the weeds. They were told not to pull the weeds for fear of uprooting the wheat also. Only at harvest time could the two be distinguished and separated. Jesus explained to His disciples the meaning of the parable. The wheat represents believers and the weeds represent unbelievers. At the end of the age, Jesus will send His angels to separate genuine believers from unbelievers.

Jesus and His angels will make the separation at the final judgment. How might our attempts to act as judges damage the “good” plants?

This parable makes clear that some people outwardly identify with Christ or the church but haven't been genuinely saved. Only those who hear and act on the words of Jesus—who by faith in Him are made right with God through Jesus's death on the cross—will spend eternity in the Father and Son's kingdom. Those who choose to ignore God's call to repentance and His offer of salvation in Jesus will be separated from the Father forever. Faith in Jesus determines our eternal destiny.

Discuss ways you need to apply this parable. Accept Jesus's offer of salvation? Spread the message?

This week, repeat Matthew 13:40 several times throughout the day as a reminder to pray for the lost.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 13:24-28

Pay attention to the tactics of the “enemy.”

This parable follows logically from an earlier parable about the seed and the sowers (Matt. 13:3-9). In that parable, Jesus spoke of four soil types, with the spotlight on the good soil. Verses 24-30 speak of two types of seed, and the spotlight is not on the “good seed” but on the bad seed that produced weeds in the field. In this parable, the good seed represents not the Word of God (as in 13:19) but people who hear and respond to the Word.

The Greek word for *weeds* likely refers to darnel, a toxic weed that closely resembles wheat in its early growth. It was impossible to tell the two plants apart until the grain formed. As the wheat and weeds grew in proximity to each other, their roots became intertwined. This made it impossible to root out the weeds without also uprooting the wheat. In the same way, godly and ungodly people populate the same community. While they may outwardly look similar, eventually each will manifest their true nature.

In this parable, it is clear that the weeds were not random weeds growing here and there throughout the wheat as is often the case. Rather, weeds were everywhere, giving evidence that these weeds had been deliberately sown.

How is the devil like the enemy in this parable? (See also John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:14; and Rev. 12:9.)



Day 2: Matthew 13:29-30

Note the patience of the landowner.

The landowner knew that while the presence of the weeds in the wheat would limit the yield of the crop, he also knew that greater damage would be done if there was an attempt to pull the weeds before the harvest. The only successful way to remove the weeds was to wait until harvest. Then they could be separated without damaging the wheat. At harvest time, the good plants would become obvious.

The Bible reveals that God is a patient God. He is “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth” (Ex. 34:6). He is “patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

The reapers in verse 30 are different from the servants in verses 27-28. Most likely, those who harvested regularly would be able to discern between wheat and weeds. Both plantings would be dealt with—wheat would be gathered into the barn and the weeds would be piled up and burned.

Two different words are used in dealing with each of the crops. To *gather* means to put similar things together, in this case, for destruction. The weeds were to be gathered for the fire. The reapers were to gather the wheat into the barn, a place of preservation.

Is it always possible to distinguish sincere believers from insincere believers? Explain.



Day 3: Matthew 13:36-39

Identify the one who sows good seed, the field, and the good seed.

Jesus responded to the disciples' request, "explain to us the parable," by identifying the characters of the parable and the setting of the story (vv. 37-39). The meaning of the parable followed in verses 40-43. The one who sowed the good seed in the field is identified here as the "Son of Man," meaning Jesus. The field that received the good seed is identified as the world. Because Jesus is the one who sows, this field is His. Even though the world may be under the power of Satan temporarily, the devil is not coequal with Christ.

Some have suggested the parable addresses the presence of genuine and false believers in the church. But Jesus specified the field as the world, not the church. This doesn't minimize the fact that there are in the church both genuine believers and people who masquerade as followers of Christ. We need to recognize that not all who claim to have a relationship with Jesus are genuine believers.

The good seed are the "children of the kingdom." These are Jesus's true followers. The weeds are sown by "the evil one." Jesus identified the evil one as the devil. Satan methodically plants his children in the world to oppose the kingdom of heaven.

But at "the end of the age" there will be a day of judgment. God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

How does this parable compare to Matthew 7:15-20?

What is your responsibility regarding the "weeds" sown by the devil?



Day 4: Matthew 13:40-41

Note the two things that will happen to counterfeit believers.

Two things will happen to the counterfeits. First, they will be gathered. Second, the weeds will be "burned in the fire." This was a typical approach to dealing with weeds in a field. This burning, however, will be unique—it takes place "at the end of the age." Thus, the real and the counterfeit followers of Christ will live together in this world until the time that God the Father determines. The word *end* speaks of completion or consummation. It is a word meaning nothing follows. There will be no second chance for those who fall into the category of weeds to change their status. The "Son of Man," Jesus, will bring judgment on all those "who cause sin" and who are "guilty of lawlessness."

Earlier in the parable, the landowner's servants asked if they should pull up the weeds (v. 28). The answer was "no" (v. 29). Instead, the instrument of judgment will be the angels belonging to the Son of Man. They, like the reapers (v. 30), know the difference between wheat and weeds.

Note that the counterfeits are those who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness. From the Greek word for *cause sin* we get our word *scandal* in our English language. It means a "stumbling block." The picture is of those who commit sin through disobeying God's Word and lead others to sin.

In what ways are counterfeit believers a stumbling block to others?



Day 5: Matthew 13:42-43

Compare these verses to Matthew 8:12 and Revelation 20:10.

At the end of the age the angels will throw the unrighteous ones into “the blazing furnace.” Scripture pictures hell as “the unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43). It will also be an “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46). The anguish of this never-ending place of torment and punishment is seen in the reaction of those thrown into the blazing furnace: “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” This is a vivid picture of anguish and despair.

Remember again that this is a parable of separation: separation of those who follow Jesus from those who reject Him. The good seed—those who belong to the Son of Man and His kingdom through their faith in Him—are called “righteous.” The word righteous speaks of a right standing before God. We cannot achieve righteousness on our own; it is provided by God through Jesus (Gal. 2:21; 3:6).

In the parable, the reapers collect the wheat into the landowner’s barn (Matt. 13:30). The word *collect* speaks of being led into God’s place of preservation.

Jesus concluded with these words: “Let anyone who has ears listen.” This was a challenge to seriously consider the meaning of the parable. One day there will be a dividing of the righteous from the unrighteous. Which group will you be in?

Does knowing there will be a final judgment with eternal consequences bring you comfort or concern? If concerned, talk to your group leader about your concerns.

APPLY THE TEXT

Jesus told His followers, “You’ll recognize them by their fruit” (Matt. 7:16). Consider the fruit of your own life. Does it give evidence to the fact that you are a follower of Jesus?

JOURNAL



TO HAVE DISCIPLES IN THE FIRST CENTURY

BY BOBBY KELLY

- The presence of disciples or learners who attached themselves to a teacher was a constant theme in the first century. Prophets, philosophers, and master teachers captivated the minds and hearts of others. This was true of both Jews and pagans. But what did it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Terminology

The Gospels and Acts employ two terms to describe a disciple. The Greek word *mathetes*, appearing 261 times in the Gospels and Acts, designated a pupil, apprentice, learner, or disciple. The term referred to a person under the authority of someone superior in knowledge and/or wisdom. The term depicted a close personal attachment that shaped one's whole life.

The Gospels used the term specifically of the Twelve (Matt. 10:1; 11:1; Mark 5:31; 6:1; Luke 9:16; John 4:31). The term also could refer to Jesus's disciples more generally, as in the introduction for Jesus's Sermon on the Plain: "After coming down with them, he stood on a level place with a large crowd of disciples" (Luke 6:17). Women too made up part of this group. The Gospel writers also used this term to describe those who followed John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-19; John 1:35; Acts 19:1-3).

The verb "to walk behind" (Greek, *akolouthēin*) is the other New Testament term that describes Jesus's disciples. A disciple was one who walked behind

his master. In the case of the Twelve, Jesus called them to "come follow me" (Matt. 4:19; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21). Their affirmative response indicated a commitment to literally walk behind Him as He traveled throughout Galilee and finally Jerusalem. Such "followship" was an expression of the disciple's submission to the teacher.

Disciples in Greek Culture

The term *mathetes* first appeared in conjunction with the Greek philosophical tradition and designated individuals who gathered around respected philosophers or philosophical schools. Plato was a disciple of Socrates. Plato gathered learners around himself and ultimately established the Academy, which was an informal association of intellectuals.

Aristotle was a disciple of Plato, who likewise gathered pupils and eventually established his own philosophical school in Athens. He built a library and gathered around him a group of intellectuals called "peripatetics" from a Greek word meaning "to walk around." They walked around as Aristotle led their discussions. These "disciples" were not chosen but initiated a relationship with a great teacher and attempted to

learn his manner of life and teaching. The goal was more the adoption of the teacher's way of life. Such imitation did not require knowledge of the teacher personally, only his way of life.

While Jesus's disciples were similar to those of the ancient Greek world, the differences were significant. To begin, Jesus chose His disciples; they did not choose Him. More importantly, Jesus called His disciples to bear witness to Him, not merely to transmit His teaching.

Disciples in Judaism

The evidence indicates that among Jews in Jesus's day, learners attached themselves to authoritative teachers called rabbis. The fact that Jesus's disciples frequently addressed Him as "Teacher" or "Rabbi" highlights the connection between Jesus and His disciples.

In the rabbinic system, the student took the initiative to link up with a respected teacher. Furthermore, the task of the learner in the rabbinic model was to receive the rabbi's teaching and then to pass that teaching along intact as a way to promote the teacher. Jews expected a disciple to be righteous according to the law. This explains why the scribes and Pharisees grumbled about Jesus's decision to associate with and issue the call of discipleship to women, sinners, and tax collectors.

In stark contrast to the rabbis, Jesus took the initiative in calling His disciples. The Twelve

did not seek out Jesus in order to be identified with Him; rather, He called them. In the case of Andrew, Peter, James, and John, Jesus was walking along the shore and called each of them to "follow me" (Matt. 4:19-22). Similarly, Jesus saw Matthew sitting at the tax office and called him (9:9). "Righteous" Jews would have viewed many of those whom Jesus called as unworthy to bear the moniker "disciple." Matthew was a tax collector (Matt. 9:9) and Simon the Zealot was radical politically. Many others Jesus called who were not part of the Twelve but were His disciples in a broader sense were sinners according to the law (Luke 15:1-2).

Finally, Jesus's disciples did more than merely pass on His teachings; He called them to bear witness to Him. Jesus's disciples did not merely transmit His teachings; they shared their whole lives with Him without condition. Thus, Jesus distinguished Himself from the rabbis (1) in the manner in which disciples came into relationship with Him, (2) in the type of people He called, and (3) in the basic function they served. "The distinction between [Jesus] and the [rabbis] was not one of degree as between different teachers. It was a fundamental one. He taught as one especially authorized by God, so that His Word was God's Word which men could not evade."¹

Perhaps the most helpful parallel to Jesus's call for discipleship is the prophetic model of Elijah calling Elisha to be his apprentice.

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The Church of the Beatitudes is built on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The church is octagonal, representing the eight beatitudes in Jesus's sermon. Some have equated Jesus's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 with His Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:17-49. Though both contain several items that are alike, the plausible explanation is that they were two different sermons by Jesus.

In 1 Kings 19:19-21, Elijah found Elisha plowing with the twelve teams of oxen. Elijah walked by Elisha “and threw his mantle over him” (1 Kings 19:19). The mantle represented Elijah’s prophetic anointing and authority. This was Elisha’s prophetic call. Elisha’s request to go home and kiss his parents goodbye indicates a hesitation or an attempt to stall. Elijah responded with a strong challenge to Elisha: “Go on back,” he replied, “for what have I done to you?” (v. 20). Elisha met the challenge and slaughtered his oxen as a sacrifice to God, a dedication of himself to the prophetic call and a commitment to become Elijah’s apprentice.

Elijah’s forbidding Elisha to return home to tell his parents goodbye echoes a later scene in Jesus’s ministry when He called an unnamed man to “follow me.” The man responded, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:61-62).

In reality, Jesus’s demand was more radical than Elijah’s. Further, His call to obedience and commitment surpassed the demands of other religious leaders of the day. And yet, without apology, He called others to follow in His footsteps. He would show His followers the way of costly discipleship in His willingness to come down from the right hand of glory, to suffer humiliation and agony, and to give His life in a grisly crucifixion. The path is costly, but He has shown us the way, and the way leads to life.

This article first appeared in the Spring 2017 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Dr. Bobby Kelly is the Ruth Dickinson professor of Bible at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

1. Helmut Kramer, Rolf Rendtorff, Rudolf Meyer, and Gerhard Friedrich, “προφητης” (prophets, prophet) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 6 (1968), 843.