Part Two: The Parable of the Weeds and The Parable of the Net
"How shall I describe the kingdom of God?," Jesus
Understanding the Parable of the Weeds  by Jeremy K. Bratcher

**Historical Details and Opening of the Parable** The Kingdom of Heaven is the central focus of this collection of similes... “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...” introduces this collection of teachings.

Like the Parable of the Soils in the previous guide, Jesus begins this parable with a man sowing seed. The twist for this parable is there are two sowers: a man and his enemy.

It was common practice in the ancient world that one’s enemy would sow weeds... in this case, darnel.

Darnel is a weedy rye grass with a poisonous seed sickening animals and people who came into contact with it. In early stages, darnel looks just like wheat, but can be clearly identified at harvest time.

**Suspense** The sower sowed good seed. He has every intention to harvest a good crop. Yet, his enemy has other plans. At night his enemy comes and sows this bad seed.

**Progress and Plot Conflict** Notice when the workers tell the Master of the House about the problem the blame is never directed on the workers for allowing this to happen. The Master of the House points directly to the true culprit... his enemy.

The difficulty with the darnel being sowed on top of the good seed is that the roots become so intertwined that pulling out the bad plant would damage the good plant.

Additionally, until a certain time, the plants couldn’t be distinguished from one another. The workers could mistakenly pull the wrong plant. Thus, the Master of the House exhorts the workers to wait for the right time to pull the bad plants. The reapers task then will be to identify the tares and toss them out while bringing the wheat harvest into the storehouse.
**Explanation of Elements** As with the Parable of the Soils, Jesus offers his disciples further explanation. Jesus’ explanation is found several verses later in Matthew 13:36-43.

After the explanation, Jesus presents his disciples with that same “end stress” as with the Parable of the Soils, “He who has ears, let Him hear.”

**Statement of General Theme and Variations** Very simply, the parable defines a looming judgment that is coming to the whole world. Although the true distinction of Kingdom participants won’t be clear until the end, the explanation of the parable brings more tension than clarity as we must realize the profound separation and judgment of which Jesus speaks.

**Desired Response (Then and Now)** Jesus stresses the importance of hearing his words clearly. Just as he explained his use of parables in Matthew 13:10-17, Jesus explicitly declares consequences of failing to understand his teaching here. Before there seemed to be a casual warning that many wouldn’t have engaged with careful attention, but now the stakes are higher!

Jesus speaks not just of distinction, but of distinctness that leads to separation. This is no mere philosophical consequence. The tension of turning from Jesus is being separated from Jesus. Jesus uses very specific language in the explanation passage to describe this separation and it is far from good.

More on this is explained in the next section.

The photo below illustrates the similarities of the wheat and weeds:
"Behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst."
Jesus, Luke 17:21

Understanding the Parable of the Net

**Historical Details and Opening of the Parable** Fishing was a hugely significant life support in the ancient world. Net fishing and separating “good fish” from “bad fish” was a very common practice. Those listening would’ve recognized exactly what Jesus was talking about as the nets were pulled up to the beaches for fish sorting.

These nets were massive, shaped like a 750 to 1000 foot long wall and upwards to 25 feet high at the center. The bottom was weighted and the head rope corked so it would float. This would allow the net to be dragged toward the shore on both ends trapping the fish inside.

The good fish/bad fish issue in the ancient Jewish world centered around dietary customs of a fish being considered unclean (Leviticus 11:9-12).

Jesus uses this parable to compare the Kingdom of Heaven to this net.

**Progress and Plot Conflict** As would be common to see in the ancient world, fisherman threw nets into the sea and dragged the net toward the shore. When the net was full, it was pulled up on the shore line. There on the beach, the men separated the fish.

**Suspense** Throwing out the “bad fish” was also common. Typically, the fish were tossed back into the sea, almost carelessly. But here, the tension of the parable is called in...the unclean fish are tossed away. They are treated as refuse and thrown away. They are of no value to the fisherman.

**End Stress** As it was with the wheat and tares, the emphasis here is on this profound final judgment.

Jesus concludes this message almost verbatim with that of the wheat and tares...(see Matthew 13:41-42 as compared with Matthew 13: 49-50)
Unclear Statements or Exaggeration “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” As rendered in English, this phrase is understood to call forth anger, dismay and pain.

The Greek portrays a much more gruesome picture. The noun brugmoz (brugmos) means “tear in pieces, devour--of a gnawing disease.”

Either way, the scene isn’t good. Why would Jesus use such a phrase?

All these references to weeping and gnashing of teeth have one thing in common—the undeniable fact that those who do not belong to Christ will suffer this terrible fate...judgment is real and it’s not good for those who do not follow Jesus.

The pain that causes the gnashing of teeth will be unknown in heaven, and there will be no weeping, no wailing and no tears. The sorrow and death that cause us to weep and mourn will be a thing of the past. Sickness, death, persecution, and sin will be no more.

Statement of General Theme and Variations As with the wheat and tares, the focus is on distinction and separation.

The final arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven extends like a net across the world and “no race or category of person will escape the final judgment. All will be sorted into two groups, those God accepts and those He rejects.” Craig Bloomberg, Interpreting the Parables.

Desired Response (Then and Now) The greater tension of separation isn’t just on the acceptance or rejection by God...the Gospel’s responsibility falls on the hearer. As Jesus has said, “he who ears, let him hear.”

Hear this from John 3:16-18: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”
“If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God first, it will in the end make no difference what you have chosen instead.”

William Law

“Christ does not save us by acting a parable of divine love; he acts the parable of divine love by saving us. That is the Christian faith.”

Austin Farrer

One Last Thought:

Sadly, those who reject God will realize what they are truly lost and the realization that there is no “second chance” will cause them to feel the full weight of the pain that goes with that knowledge. The pain of being separated from God does not go away. It is eternal and unrelenting. We all deserve that kind of punishment: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23) but God, in His mercy, made it possible for us to avoid that eternal pain and suffering. Paul explains, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

All who accept the gift God has provided through the resurrection of Jesus Christ will escape the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Paul proclaims to the Romans “that if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10).

Jesus uses powerful imagery like wailing and gnashing of teeth to illustrate the importance of turning away from the sin that leads down that path and turning to Him who alone provides salvation.
Inquiring Minds Want to Know:

**Question:** "Is hell real? Is hell eternal?"

**Answer:** It is interesting that a much higher percentage of people believe in the existence of heaven than believe in the existence of hell. According to the Bible, though, hell is just as real as heaven.

The Bible clearly and explicitly teaches that hell is a real place to which the wicked/unbelieving are sent after death. We have all sinned against God (Romans 3:23). The just punishment for that sin is death (Romans 6:23). Since all of our sin is ultimately against God (Psalm 51:4), and since God is an infinite and eternal Being, the punishment for sin, death, must also be infinite and eternal. Hell is this infinite and eternal death which we have earned because of our sin.

The punishment of the wicked dead in hell is described throughout Scripture as “eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41), “unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12), “shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2), a place where “the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44-49), a place of “torment” and “fire” (Luke 16:23-24), “everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9), a place where “the smoke of torment rises forever and ever” (Revelation 14:10-11), and a “lake of burning sulfur” where the wicked are “tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

The punishment of the wicked in hell is as never ending as the bliss of the righteous in heaven. Jesus Himself indicates that punishment in hell is just as everlasting as life in heaven (Matthew 25:46). The wicked are forever subject to the fury and the wrath of God. Those in hell will acknowledge the perfect justice of God (Psalm 76:10). Those who are in hell will know that their punishment is just and that they alone are to blame (Deuteronomy 32:3-5). Yes, hell is real. Yes, hell is a place of torment and punishment that lasts forever and ever, with no end. Praise God that, through Jesus, we can escape this eternal fate (John 3:16, 18, 36).

“Hell yeah!” “I had a hell of a time.” “What the hell?” If we truly understood the overwhelming significance of hell, we’d never throw it so casually around.
Reflection Questions:

Read Matthew 13:34-30; Matthew 13:36-43 and Matthew 13:47-50

1. Summarize the parable of the wheat and tares.

2. Read the parable carefully and answer the following questions:
   a. Who is the sower and what kind of seed does He sow (Matthew 13:37)?
   b. What does the field represent (Matthew 13:38)?
   c. What or who are represented by the “good seed” (Matthew 13:38)?
   d. What or who are represented by the “tares” (Matthew 13:38)?
   e. Who is the “enemy” (Matthew 13:39)?
   f. Who are the “reapers” (Matthew 13:41)?

3. When does Jesus say the problem of the tares will be addressed, and why (Matthew 13:41)?

4. Summarize the parable of the net.
5. In what way will there be a separation of the good from the bad (the just from the wicked), and who will do the separating?

6. What happens to “the bad,” or the wicked (Matthew 13:50)?

7. What is the general theme of these parables?

8. How are they similar?

9. How are they different?

10. The Greek word for “hell” is “Gehenna.” Look up the word in a Bible dictionary or on www.biblestudytools.com and explain where this word came from, and what it means.

11. Using the same tools as question 10, find other places where the following terms are used, and explain what they mean:
   a. Furnace of fire (or lake of fire).
   b. Weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Application:
What personal applications can we make from this parable?
Jesus said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.”

It has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The Lord Jesus frequently used parables as a means of illustrating profound, divine truths. Stories such as these are easily remembered, the characters bold, and the symbolism rich in meaning. Yet, there was something much more behind the parables of Matthew 13...the secrets to the Kingdom of Heaven were being revealed. As Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” The Kingdom awaits!