

## “It’s Not Easy Being Wheat”

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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 = sowing weeds among the wheat

**A** well-dressed and coiffured woman is between trains. She stops in a restaurant in the train station for a meal. She orders her food, but discovers she has no cutlery and so goes off to fetch silverware. She returns to her table, only to find a poorly dressed man eating a salad.



Totally flummoxed, she sits down. She stares at a disreputable man eating her dinner. Standing on her rights, she takes portions of the salad much to his surprise. At one point he fetches coffee for the two of them. After he

leaves, only then does she notice her own meal sitting on another table.<sup>1</sup>

The homeless man is innocent, and the best-dressed woman turns out to be the interloper. The high status person happens to be wrong. The usual suspect is the one in the right, turns out to be the generous, gracious and hospitable one.

This scenario and ones like it are so common that they are now listed on urban legend websites.<sup>2</sup> Today what we would call an urban legend, the people of Jesus’ day call a parable.

**O**ur parable today is called, in the old King James, the parable of “*the Wheat and the Tares.*” Modern translations call it “*the Weeds among the Wheat.*”



In a parable it is important to identify what each actor represents. Just as importantly, it is critical to discover where we fit.

Jesus gives us the “who’s who:” the owner of the field is God. Jesus is one sowing the good seed. The enemy who sows the weeds is named ~ Diabolos, the slanderer. The ones who exact God’s judgment are most definitely not us but the angels.



**W**e would love to think of ourselves as the ones able to distinguish the wheat from the weeds. We assume it is easy, but in actual fact when they first emerge it is nearly impossible to tell the good wheat from the weeds.

The word used here for 'weed' is no garden variety weed. The word actually is a specific kind of noxious weed called darnel. Darnel is poisonous and quite dangerous. Ingesting even a small amount can have very unpleasant effects, dizziness and nausea. Larger amounts can cause death. To harvest it along with the good grain would contaminate the harvest and render the whole toxic.



Darnel is also known as *false wheat* or *cheat*. The problem identifying it early on is that when first sprouting and growing, it looks almost exactly like wheat ~ only when the full heads mature is darnel to be easily distinguished.

**W**ho are we in the parable? We are in fact neither the wheat nor the weeds nor the angels exacting judgment. Our place in Jesus' allegory is as the well-meaning servants in the fields of the LORD thinking we can tell the good from the bad. We would with the best of intentions attempt to pull up and destroy evil right now. In the process we would most likely harm many innocents, uprooting the good along with the bad. Such is the fate of human imperfect judgment.

Jesus' point with the *false wheat* is that evil may initially present as good, and good may initially present as evil. We are not wise enough to tell the difference. We often find ourselves in the same position as the protagonists in the movies *Groundhog Day* or *Clockwise*. In these Bill Murray and John Cleese keep trying to solve a problem but only end up making the situation worse and worse. God wants to prevent us from doing more harm than good. Our role is not to judge. That role is reserved for God alone.

Who would we consider the wheat today? Who is a weed? Who is a righteous child of the kingdom? Who is cursed? Some there are among us who will tell you they know for sure! But has anyone actually given us the authority or wisdom to



discern the good from the evil? In Jesus' parable the Master retains that authority.

Under the circumstances, it would be prudent to be careful not to decide prematurely what is evil and what is good. It will become apparent in time. What Jesus says elsewhere is true here as well: **“Do not judge”<sup>3</sup> “You will know them by their fruits.”<sup>4</sup>** In the end the children of the kingdom and the children of evil will be distinguished by their deeds.

So it is with the good and the evil. If we indiscriminately try to uproot evil now, we are likely to do more damage than good. We don't have the Master's knowledge of who is really the good grain and who has the heart of darkness. The Master orders us to wait patiently for perfect justice to prevail in the harvest at the age's end.

**I**ronically one way the toxic darnel can be distinguished from the good wheat is because the darnel stands up straight with black, feather weight heads when mature ~ noticeably different from the wheat's heavier heads which bend the stems over. Thus, pardon the pun, but in Jesus' parable, the *'seediest' among us turn out to be wheat* and the *'upright' among us turn out be weeds*.



In our story of the traveler in the station unintentionally sharing someone else's meal, all the while thinking it is her own and getting quite worked up about it ~ in almost all variations of this urban legend the presumed thief is invariably an outsider, a marginal and at least a vaguely threatening figure, while the real thief is one who is normally above reproach.<sup>5</sup>

**L**et's be honest, every one of us is prone to judge others by appearances. We do have a tendency to jump to conclusions. We presume the disreputable looking are likely the bad ones, and the well-dressed and well-spoken are the good ones. So it behooves us to be very careful declaring someone else a weed.

Just because we put someone on our bad list does not mean that person is on God's bad list. The truth is the *seediest' among us may turn out to be wheat* and the *'upright' among us may turn out be weeds*.

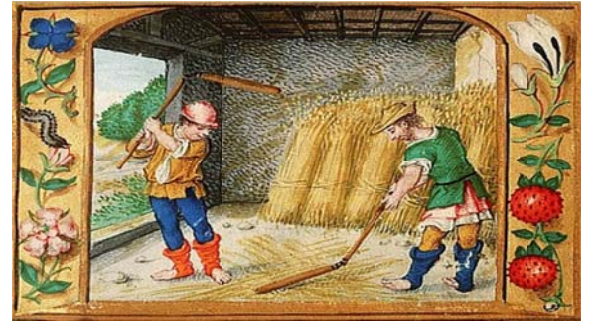
*The 'seediest' among us may  
turn out to be wheat.*

*The 'upright' among us may turn  
out to be weeds.*



We find it easy to presumptively judge others, but our standards are often skewed. We are often dead wrong. We are prone as Jesus points out to miss the log in our own eye when pointing out the speck in another's. Yet it is so easy to mistake something we don't like, something we don't understand and call it evil. Best to be careful. Best to be wise.

**W**ith only a cursory look at this parable, some see themselves in the role of the angels exacting God's judgment. Some think scripture justifies purifying the church, and forcefully destroying whatever we deem to be evil in our world. Or on the other extreme our moral tale could be read as a call for withdrawal completely from the world and all its evil. Both kinds of Christians exist. Yet if we listen to what Jesus actually says here, nothing could be further from the truth.



What Jesus does call for us to do is to correctly identify both the real evil within ourselves and the real evil we encounter in the world ~ to react with humility not arrogance to the problem of evil, to refrain from summary judgment, to repent sincerely for our own failings, to be so in touch with God's Spirit that we separate ourselves from all we discern to be, not on our own bad list, but to separate ourselves from what truly is on God's bad list.

The Good News in this parable is that God is both God of justice and grace-filled. Our God is a God of second chances, giving evil time to repent, reform, restore and be restored ~ giving us time to repent, reform, restore and be restored. And even though we live in the between times with one foot in this world and the other in God's realm, be assured, all wrong will be righted, all evil will be vanquished, true justice, perfect justice, God's justice will indeed prevail.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.snopes.com/crime/safety/cookies.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Adams, *The Great Salmon of Doubt* and also in his *So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish*.  
<http://theoldvillage.wordpress.com/2004/01/28/douglas-adams-shares-a-true-story/>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:1

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:16, 20

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.snopes.com/crime/safety/cookies.asp>